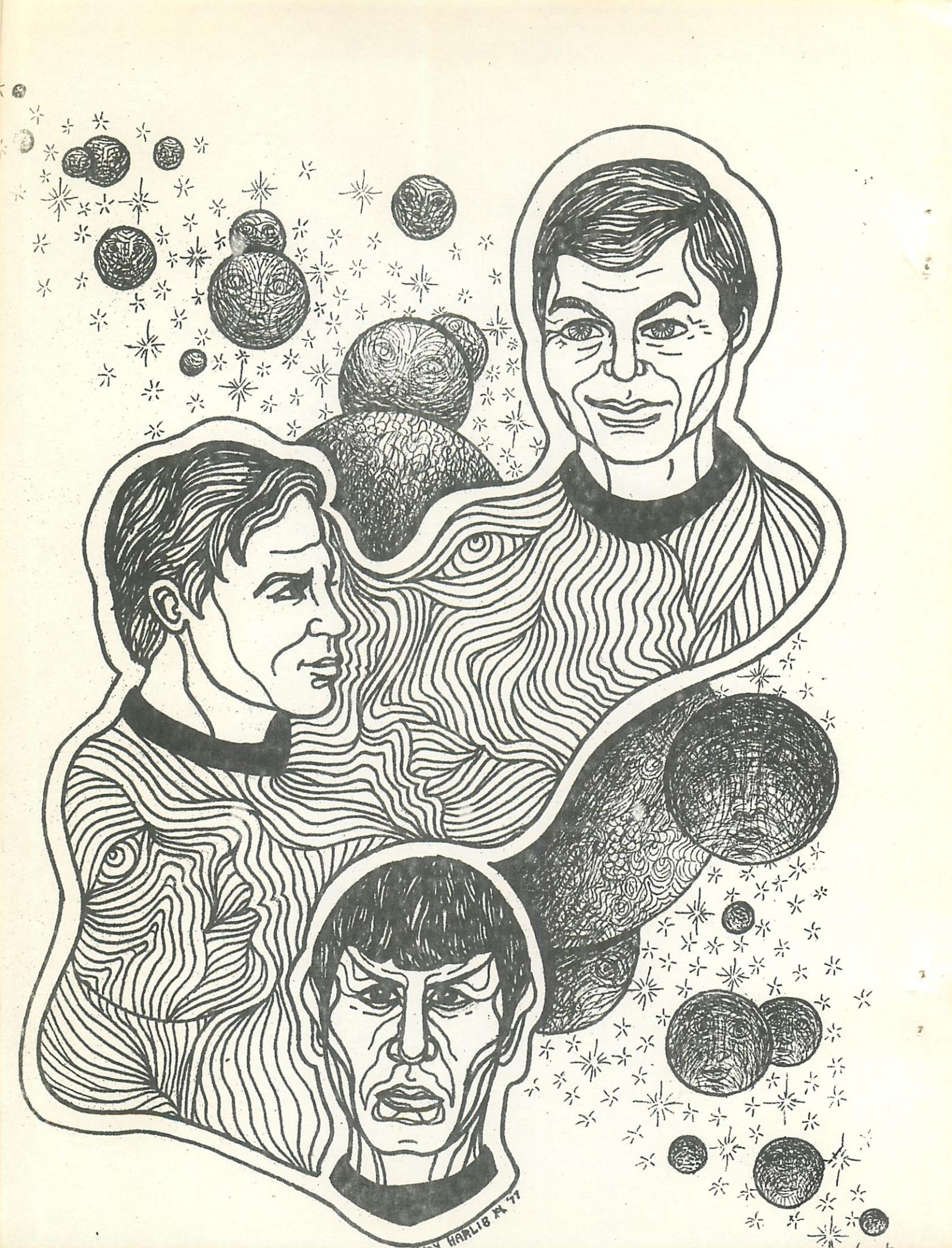




TIME
WARP



by HARLIB 1977



TIME WARP

volume 1

isis press

issue 1

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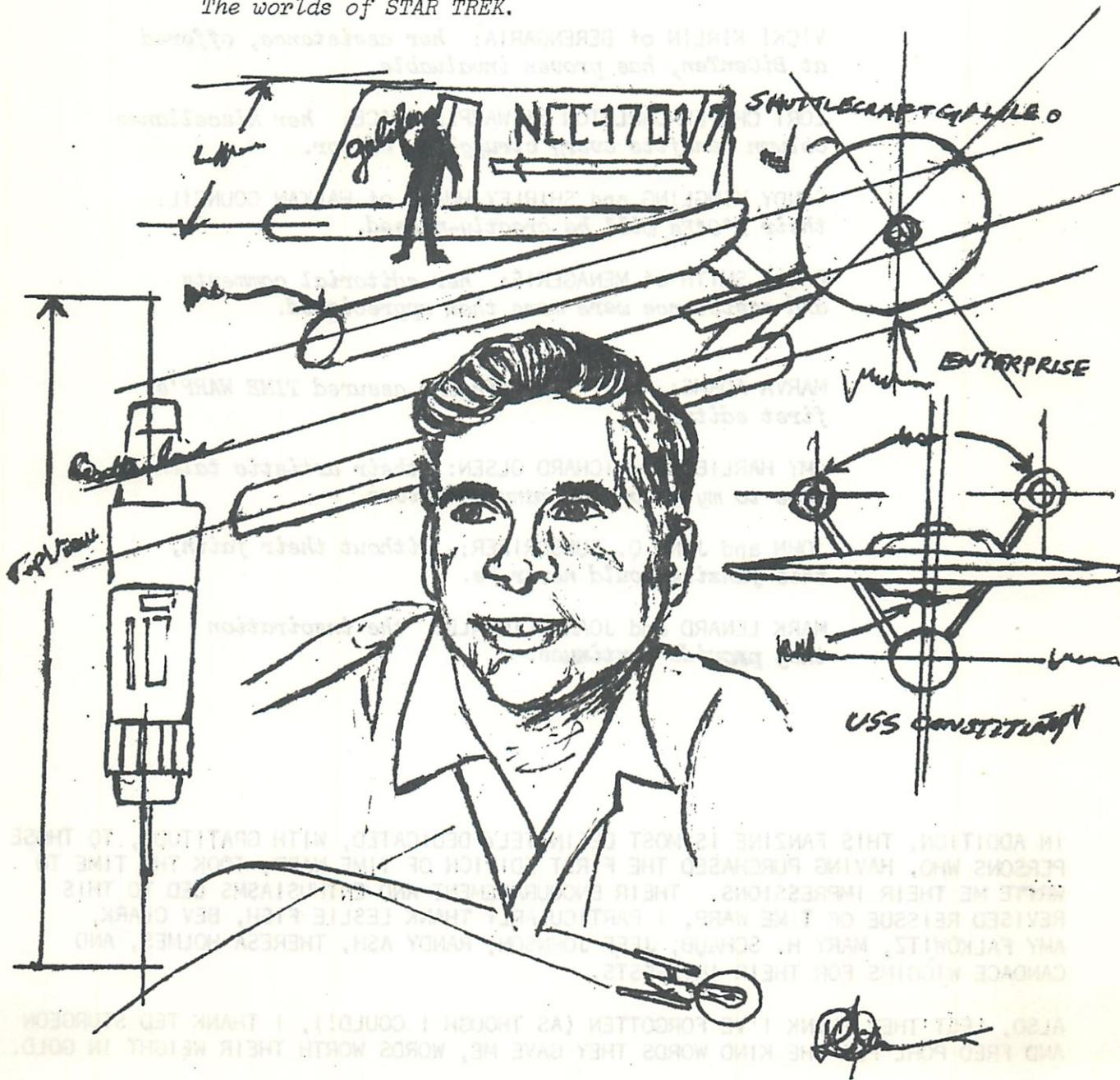
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IN GRATITUDE

To the creator, Gene Roddenberry, we humbly
dedicate this offering. We thank him for ten
years of inspiration, of joy, of grandeur; and
but most of all we thank him for allowing us
to share in his dream:

The worlds of STAR TREK.



THIS FANZINE IS ALSO DEDICATED - WITH SINCERITY AND HUMILITY- TO ALL OF THOSE FRIENDS WHO HAD SO LARGE A SHARE IN MAKING MY DREAM COME TRUE.

SUSAN ARMSTRONG: *her magnificent illustrations bring my CYCLE to true reality.*

VIRGINIA LEE SMITH: *a truly Herculean - or, rather elven - task on such short notice.*

KATHY CARLSON: *a rising star in her own right.*

VICKI KIRLIN of BERENGARIA: *her assistance, offered at BiCenten, has proven invaluable.*

LORI CHAPEK-CARLETON of WARPED SPACE: *her Miscellanea column benefits every struggling editor.*

SANDY YINGLING and SHIRLEY HUANG of HALKAN COUNCIL: *their P*O*Fs will be greatly-missed.*

PAULA SMITH of MENAGERIE: *her editorial comments and assistance were more than appreciated.*

MARVA ADAMS: *her fleet fingers assured TIME WARP's first edition.*

AMY HARLIB and RICHARD OLSEN: *their artistic talents came to my rescue on many occasions.*

JOHN and JANE Q. SUBSCRIBER: *without their faith, this fanzine could never be.*

MARK LENARD and JOANN LINVALE: *the inspiration they provide continues.*

IN ADDITION, THIS FANZINE IS MOST DEFINITELY DEDICATED, WITH GRATITUDE, TO THOSE PERSONS WHO, HAVING PURCHASED THE FIRST EDITION OF TIME WARP, TOOK THE TIME TO WRITE ME THEIR IMPRESSIONS. THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT AND ENTHUSIASMS LED TO THIS REVISED REISSUE OF TIME WARP. I PARTICULARLY THANK LESLIE FISH, BEV CLARK, AMY FALKOWITZ, MARY H. SCHAUER, JEFF JOHNSON, RANDY ASH, THERESA HOLMES, AND CANDACE WIGGINS FOR THEIR INTERESTS.

ALSO, LEST THEY THINK I'VE FORGOTTEN (AS THOUGH I COULD!), I THANK TED STURGEON AND FRED POHL FOR THE KIND WORDS THEY GAVE ME, WORDS WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD.

AND FINALLY, FOR REASONS TOO MANY AND TOO COMPLEX TO GO INTO, THIS 'ZINE IS DEDICATED, WITH LOVE, TO JEAN L. STEVENSON AND ALSO TO PATRICIA C. NOLAN.

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outime

AN EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of TIME WARP. The fanzine you now hold in your hand has been the cause of grey hairs (premature, let me hasten to add!), incipient ulcers, frazzled nerves, broken dates, writer's block, writer's cramp, the screaming meemies, and acute attacks of mass hysteria. But if you, the reader, find it somehow pleasing, all shall have been worthwhile.

I have been reading science-fiction for over twenty years (I can still remember rebelling from the regurgitated pabulum being handed out to second and third graders in those days, and sidling over to the "teenage" section of my local library. After going through all the horse books, and all the dog books, I tried mysteries and romances. But the former had no appeal and the latter I found downright dull - look, I was only 7 or 8! And in those days, who had ever even heard of *Lolita*? Let me hasten to add that I've since changed my mind about both mysteries and romances. But, to resume - by the merest chance I picked up a copy of Poul Anderson's *Vault of the Ages*. Addiction was immediate, and long lasting!) and have been a STAR TREK fan since September 8, 1966. Yet somehow, in all that time, I never became involved with fandom.

My first exposure to fandom - of any kind - came when I read *Star Trek Lives!* and suddenly realized that those reruns on WPIX were not being broadcast to me alone. There were, quite literally, thousands, maybe millions who found the STAR TREK universe to be "fascinating". I WAS NOT ALONE!

I decided to get my feet wet. I entered the waters of STAR TREK fandom by attending both New York STAR TREK conventions (remember January and February in New York?). Curiouser and curioser. Although I failed to see the connection between a "space-port girly-girl" and STAR TREK (I'd been under the impression that "girly-girls" belonged to the multi-leveled universe of Cordwainer Smith), I enjoyed myself mightily.

Then a friend became involved with the publication of a fanzine, FROM THE INTERGALACTIC CORPORATION OF QUADROTRITICALE QUIRPS, LTD. (I kid you not. That is the title of their 'zine. In desperation, the editors now refer to it as THE INTERGALACTIC ETC.). She approached me for a TREK story, and I - poor fool - willingly agreed.

The difficult part came as soon as I had to determine what to write. I must have read the final chapter of *Star Trek Lives!* fifty times over. Gradually, it dawned on me. I could write *anything*! I could answer any questions I might have about the STAR TREK universe (thank you, Leslie Fish! At last I know why Andorians have antennae!), I could provide sequels to "unfinished" episodes, I could create my own "alternate universes", I could envision "new voyages" for the USS Enterprise. All the "what-ifs" that had been haunting me for years could now be shared. I could have an audience - an appreciative audience by all I could determine - for the stories I had begun plotting while still in complete ignorance of STAR TREK fandom and fanzines (and every time I think of those wasted years I cry!!).

I began to work simultaneously on two or three story possibilities for THE ETC. But all the while, in the back of my mind, I was building up - and destroying - empires. *Cytherea* had to be written - its "cycle" had come. (And can you imagine the consternation of THE ETC.'s faneds? No way, no where, no when did they expect the *reams* of material that began to pour out of my type-writer. They'd have been happy with a short short story. Instead, they got a seven chapter Introduction to a new "alternate universe".

Not being one to do things in a small way, I began to explore the world of STAR TREK fanzines - and, incidentally, of fanzines in general. I was engrossed by the snippets of *Trekfic* (see how quickly one picks up the language?) presented in *Star Trek Lives!* or reprinted in *New Voyages*, so I tried to track down as many of the stories and articles as possible. It has been difficult, and even impossible in some cases (many of the stories and articles mentioned in *STL* or reprinted in *NV* first appeared in fanzines that are *long* out of print!), but it has been a fascinating search with ever-widening ripples of influence.

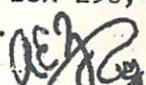
Well, there I was. Becoming more and more engrossed in the world of fanzines. Creating a STAR TREK universe of my own in *Cytherea*. Attending STAR TREK conventions. The next step was inevitable. I would become a fanzine editor myself.

And here I am. It has been an arduous task, that there is no denying. But seeing the finished product like this, it was definitely worth it.

We are presently accepting submissions for TIME WARP 3. No publication date has been set for this as yet. There is no deadline for submissions to TW. If number 3 is filled, we will hold your submission for consideration in TIME WARP 4. All submissions will be considered. Although TIME WARP is primarily a STAR TREK fanzine, stories or articles of a general science-fiction or fantasy orientation may be submitted. The only criteria are quality and space allowances. The field for submissions is open: fiction, speculative science articles and extrapolations, critical essays on SF topics and on the ST universe(s), poetry, reviews, puzzles, vignettes, etc.

If you would be interested in illustrating for TIME WARP, please drop us a line. We are in need of "spot" illustrations (aliens, space-ships, Enterprise crew, designs, etc.) for use as "filler art". We are even more in need of artists willing to illustrate stories for TIME WARP. In addition, future issues of TIME WARP will feature select art folios. Have an idea you'd like to develop? Drop us a line. (Bear in mind that intricate shading or large black areas will not reproduce properly. Half-tone screens may be used, however.)

Please enclose a SASE or sufficient return postage with all submissions. Allow us time to thoroughly consider your work (at least a month). Major contributors will receive free copies of the issue in which their work appears.

Letters-of-comment are eagerly awaited at Isis Press. TIME WARP is, after all, a fanzine. It is in existence to give you pleasure and enjoyment. Please let us know if we have succeeded. Appropriate LOCs will be printed in future issues, and all notable comments will be passed on to the artist or author concerned. LOCs and submissions should be addressed to: TIME WARP, PO Box 296, Staten Island, New York 10301. Meanwhile, enjoy---and PAX VOBISCU. 

"The Clandestine Adventure of the Arcane Tomatoe!"

by Margret Mary McMahon

Unbeknownst to Captain Kirk, who was innocently at play in the gym, Sherlock Bones stalked the halls of the Enterprise, seeking adventure. Just as the good doctor passed the Botany Lab, he found what he was seeking.

Lieutenant Sulu ran out of the lab with a loud yelp just as Bones sauntered by. "My prize tomato is gone!", shrieked the Lieutenant.

"Don't tell me," said our hero. "The giant tomato that you were growing in the lab to be the biggest tomato in history is missing-- and under extremely suspicious circumstances. And furthermore, you are in need of assistance-- professional assistance such as mine, of course."

"Huh? What?", said Sulu in true consternation. "But how could you possibly know?"

"It's nothing, my dear boy, don't compliment me. It is merely a job. Truly elementary. And speaking of elementary-- wait a second."

And with that he ran to the wall communicator. "Hello, Sickbay? Sherlock Bones here. Nurse Watson, come if convenient. If inconvenient, come all the same."

"Yes, Doctor-- Sorry. Yes, Sherlock Bones!", came the voice of our heroine, Nurse Christine Chapel, called Nurse Watson by Sherlock Bones. "Er-- Sherlock Bones, where are you?"

There was some muttering from Sherlock Bones about detective's assistants who were unable to detect the simplest things without the Master Detective's assistance. Then he relented and told Christine that he was right outside the Botany Lab with Sulu.

Christine went promptly to the Lab to join them.

When she arrived, Sulu, more puzzled than ever, turned to her desperately for an explanation to the events in which he had suddenly found himself. Sherlock Bones, meanwhile, started into the Lab to search for clues.

"I find it best to humor the doctor when he gets in one of these moods", Christine whispered to Sulu. "If the Captain gets word of this, he'll soon straighten it all out."

Before she could continue, the doctor's voice interrupted her.

"Why don't y'all come in, Mr. Sulu, and you, too, Nurse Watson," said our hero.

As soon as they joined him in the Lab, he began his formal preliminary questioning.

"When did you last see your tomato?"

"Before lunch."

"Can you give a brief description of it? Be specific."

"You know what a tomato looks like!"

"Please describe it. I need facts, man!"

"Well, it looked-- well, like-- like a regular tomato. Only bigger. And I feel pretty silly."

"Mr. Sulu, if you wish me to solve this case, you will tell me all the facts," said Sherlock Bones. "Please, describe the tomato."

"Well, it was greenish, and big."

There was a giggle, and the three turned around to see Ensign Chekov, who had entered the Lab in time to hear most of the preceding conversation. "Eet seems dat I left a fuel consumption report when I visited my plants," he said hurriedly. He then busied himself.

The questioning continued.

"Where did you last see this tomato, Mr. Sulu?"

"On that tomato vine, right over there," said Mr. Sulu, pointing to where the plant stood in the corner of the Lab.

Mr. Chekov found this too much to bear and broke out giggling in Russian. When everyone turned to face him, he found his report and scurried to the door. "Have a very nice day!", said he as he backed out, still giggling.

After a short pause Sherlock said, "I wonder what he found so funny?"

While Mr. Sulu stayed in the Botany Lab, Sherlock Bones went investigating every lead. (Nurse Watson, of course, accompanied Sherlock Bones.)

Sherlock Bones and Nurse Watson contacted their underground - the Medical Unit Irregulars. This unit, headed by Ensign Pavel Chekov, could go anywhere in the ship, through the shadows, to gain any information needed by the great

detective and his assistant. Today Chekov reported to the detective after regaining the composure he had lost during the incident in the Botany Lab.

"I have made all de pwoper inquiries. De organization is at work!"

Bones nodded at this information. Then he said, "I didn't notice anything suspicious down at the Lab, did you?"

"No, sir," said Chekov to his leader's question, "I didn't."

Bones nodded again and indicated that they would simply have to wait for some results to come from their inquiries. However, sitting around waiting for results is the dullest thing imaginable. Chekov was the first to get bored, so he went out to find Sulu, who had by now totally recovered from his loss.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Leslie was working undercover for the Medical Unit Irregulars and was investigating the gym. He was questioning several crew members as to their whereabouts when the tomato was stolen, when Captain Kirk approached him.

"Mr. Leslie, am I mistaken, or did I just hear you asking someone about a---- a tomato?"

"No, sir, you're not mistaken. You *did* hear me questioning the crew about a tomato."

"Don't tell me, let me guess. A tomato was stolen from the Botany Lab. It was last seen hanging on a vine, and Sherlock Bones has been called in to investigate. Furthermore, I suppose you are a representative of the Medical Unit Irregulars." Kirk's voice held the usual sarcasm with which he was wont to refer to Sherlock Bones and his associates.

"Yes, sir. You are absolutely correct!" exclaimed Leslie in complete astonishment.

"I am!" exclaimed Kirk in complete astonishment.

"You certainly are, sir. But may I ask you a question?"

"Yes, Mr. Leslie?"

"How *did* you know, sir?"

Kirk just looked up and smiled. "A wild guess, perchance?" said he. He then sprinted out the door and ran to the Botany Lab.

"Aha! Mr. Sulu! Mr. Chekov! I suspected that *you* might be here."

"You did, Keptin?"

"Yes, Mr. Chekov. I just ran into Mr. Leslie and got the story--- or,

rather, gave the story.

"Sir?"

"Never mind, Mr. Chekov, never mind," said Kirk. "Where can I find the doctor?"

"If you mean Sherlock Bones, he's in Sickbay," said Sulu.

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. I will see if there has been any progress. Good day, gentlemen." With that, Kirk stalked out of the Botany Lab.

When he stalked into Sickbay in turn, he was greeted by our hero.

"Why, hi, Jim! You just come on in and make yourself at home!"

"Well, well!! Sherlock Bones!! How is your case going?" asked Kirk. "And you, Nurse Watson, is anything happening?"

"Why, nothing at all, Captain," said Christine.

"Are there any leads?" asked Kirk facetiously, scarcely expecting an actual response to his question.

"Yes," said Sherlock, leaning close, "we have a definite lead." He leaned closer. "It must remain strictly confidential, though."

"But certainly---" replied the Captain.

"We suspect foul play---that of Professor Spocklarty."

"Right. Sure. Why not?" said Kirk as he exited hurriedly. "OK. Sure." He shook his head dazedly.

After the Captain had gone, Christine and Sherlock Bones busted themselves once more. After a moment, our hero looked up perplexedly. "Did he seem annoyed to you, Watson?"

Meanwhile, Captain Kirk had gone to the bridge-- seemingly the only place to escape from the ludicrous on the ship. It was, alas, his only haven. Sitting at his command chair, feeling happiness in the security it evoked, he reviewed his conversation with Sherlock Bones. "Spocklarty?" he mumbled, unaware that it was audible.

"Pardon me, sir?" said Uhura disbelievingly.

"Spocklarty is, I believe, what the Captain said," stated Spock.

Kirk rose and walked over to Spock's station. "You have, I perceive," said Spock quietly, "been talking to Sherlock Bones. I gather he has recreated the character of Sherlock Holmes' arch-enemy, Professor Moriarty, in me as Professor Spocklarty."

"I do believe the good doctor has gone too far this time," Kirk said.

Spock raised an eye-brow. "Indeed?"

"Have you heard any of the particulars of this 'case', Spock?"

"Yes, I have. You see, the 'Medical Unit Irregulars' reach further than you think." And with that, he looked meaningfully over at Uhura.

"Oh?" said Kirk, turning around and back. "You don't suppose it would hurt any if we investigated? Just a little bit?"

"No, I don't think so. In truth, I was about to ask you the same thing."

They both left the bridge and went to the Botany Lab, the scene of the crime. Chekov and Sulu were still there, discussing plants. In Kirk's absence, they had been joined by Yeoman Janice Rand.

Spock, who was also interested in plants, walked right over to the tomato plant. As Kirk stood watching, he gave the plant a thorough going over.

"Mr. Sulu," said Spock after some length of time, "you gave the description of the tomato as green, is that not correct?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock," replied the navigator.

"Were there any ripe tomatoes the last time you looked, Lieutenant?"

"No, sir," Sulu responded.

Spock turned to the Captain. "Please call 'Sherlock Bones' and 'Nurse Watson' to the Botany Lab immediately. I think I have a break in this 'case'."

"Really, Spock?" asked Kirk.

"Yes, Captain," his First Officer responded reassuringly.

Kirk went to the wall communicator and passed Spock's message along to Sherlock Bones. Intrigued, the good doctor promised to come to the Botany Lab immediately.

Our hero entered the Lab accompanied by his chief confidante. Sighting Spock, he shouted, "Aha! I knew our paths would meet, Spocklarty!!"

Ignoring this provocative remark, Spock said, "Doctor, please ask Mr. Sulu about the ripeness of his tomatoes. Then please look at the plant. Accept this as a donated clue, ladies and gentlemen. And now, please excuse me." Spock then left the Lab before anyone else could say a word.

"What is this? A red herring left me by my formidable opponent?" asked Sherlock Bones. "Just what was it that he mentioned?"

"Merely the fact that none of those tomatoes had been ripe," said Kirk.

Having followed Spock's logic to its conclusion, he now added innocently, "Whatever bearing that has on the case."

"Well, let me look at that plant," said Sherlock.

He walked over to the vine and inspected it carefully in the minutest detail. During this examination, his colleagues---with one rather sardonic exception---held their breaths in bated anticipation. After some time---Indeed, just in time for Yeoman Rand, who was turning blue---he spoke.

"Since none of these tomatoes were ripe, including the one you seek, I must assume that you thought only an unripe, green tomato would be here. Did you ever think of looking for a ripe tomato in place of your green one?", Sherlock Bones questioned with brilliant deduction.

"Why, no!!" exclaimed Sulu.

"Then I must conclude," the great detective continued with his line of reasoning, "that your tomato ripened while you were in the mess-room, and this magnificently succulent, rosy red specimen is in actuality your missing prize-winner."

Sulu looked in wonder at the tomato to which Sherlock was pointing. "Why, how can I ever thank you for solving the mystery?"

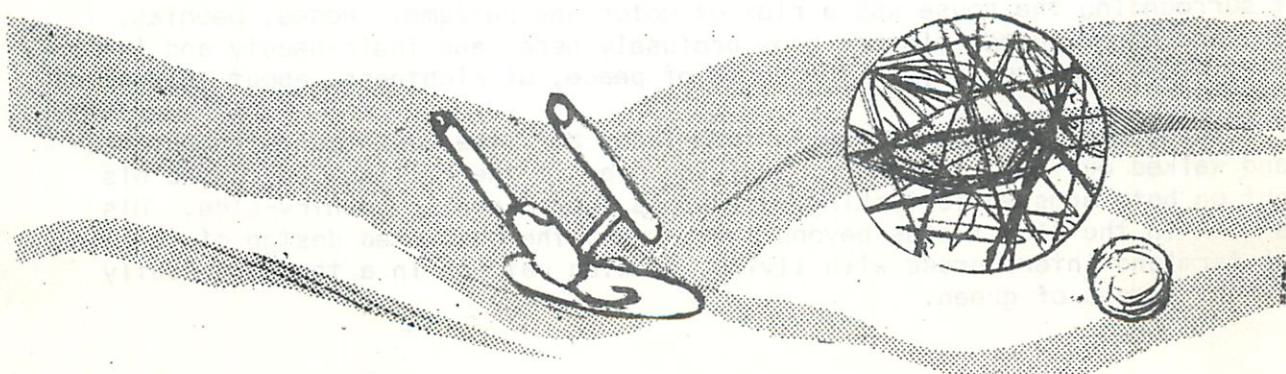
"There is no need to thank me," said the doctor. "You see, since my Medical Unit Irregulars could find no clues, there must have been no clues to find. My old grand-daddy was a farmer, and I guess I'm just a plain old country boy at heart. That led me to a theory, you see. I always say: when you rule out the impossible, then the possible, no matter how improbable, is always the truth."

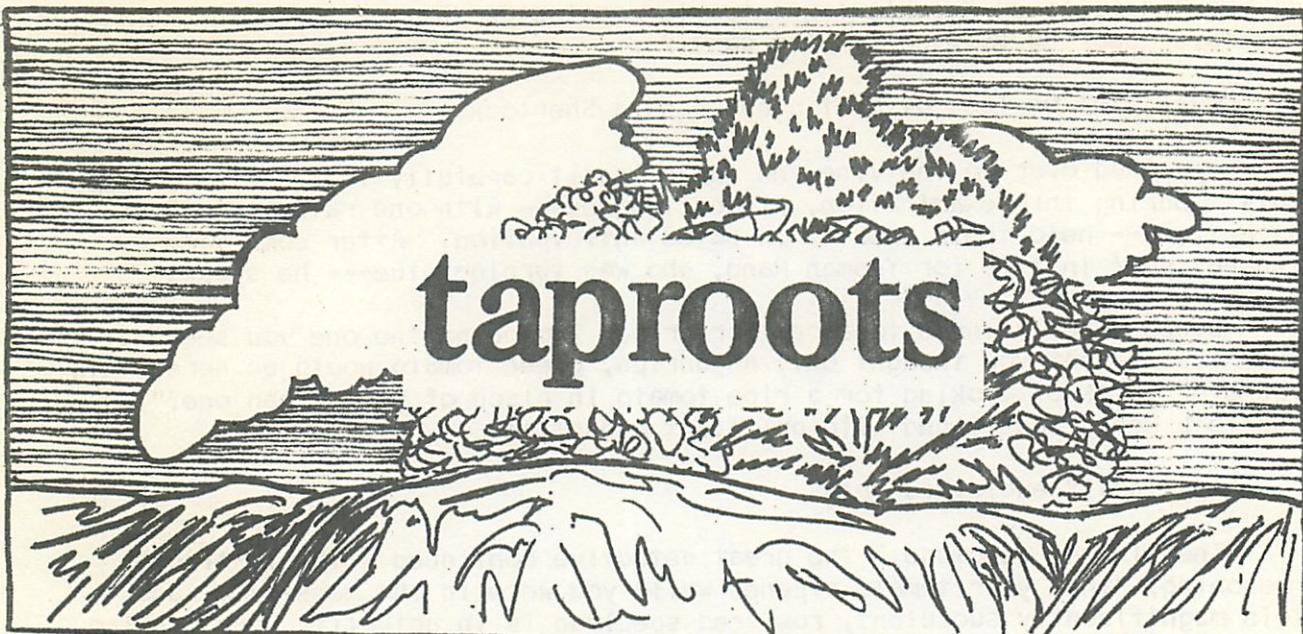
"How original!", declared Nurse Watson. "I must include that in my memoirs!"

"Good idea, Watson, old chap," said our hero.

And so the story ends; Mr. Spock heard about Sherlock Bones' "great triumph", but refused to comment---not to the Captain's surprise. The ship sailed onward, and---with the noted exception of a few---the crew rested easier.

Until the next time Sherlock Bones sought adventure.





taproots

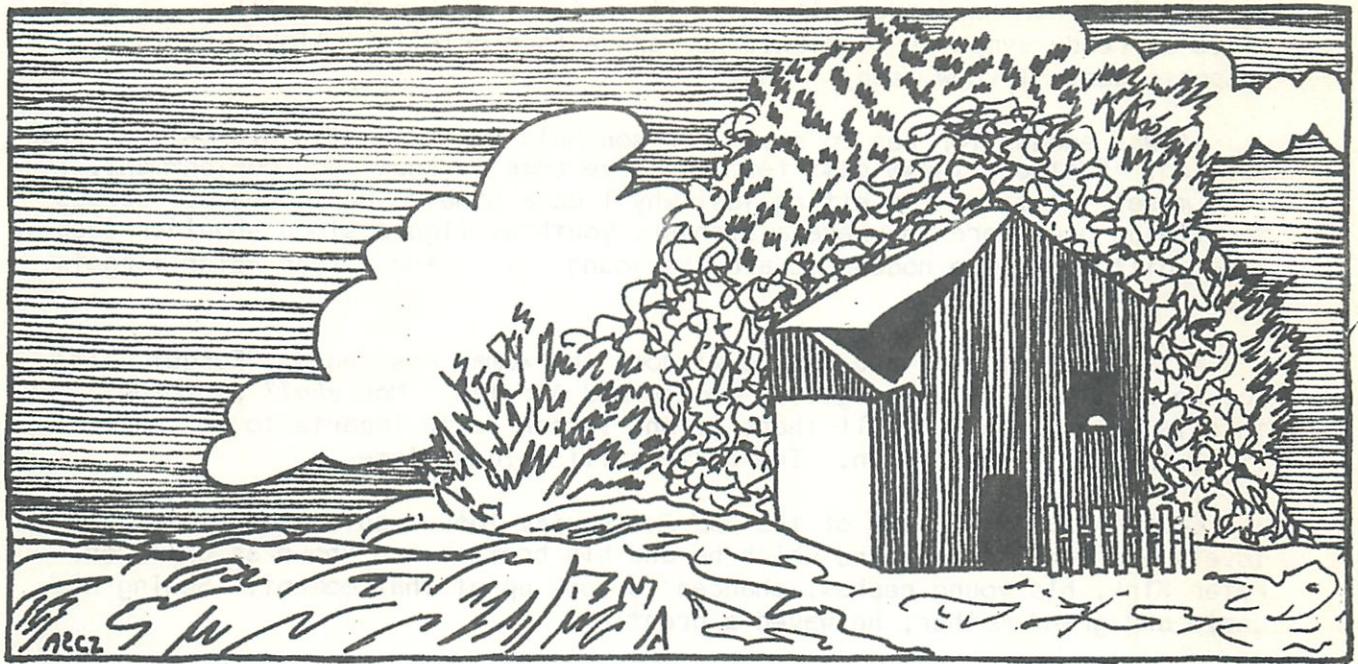
It was a golden day, a placid day, the type of day poems are made of. The sky overhead- clear, bright, cloudless- was a blue so pure it almost hurt the eye to see. In the steady warmth of the sun, numerous little flying insects went steadily about their business. The contented humming of the insects formed a rich background for the occasional murmurs of drowsy farm animals basking in the sun's rays.

In the midst of this tranquil scene slumbered an old frame farm-house. Built lovingly by hand in the late 19th century, scarcely a nail or a brace still remained of the original structure. Yet so carefully had repairs and restorations been made, the very mood and shape of the original was retained.

The house was a large rambling structure, a white clapboard affair with three stories and a wraparound porch. The rooms were large, high-ceilinged, open and airy. Green shutters and a red shingled roof added a bit of color to the scene. Doors and windows were open to the warm summer morning, and gaily patterned curtains caught vagrant breezes briefly in their folds before releasing them to the inhabitants of the house.

A young man came to the door. Bracing himself against the door jamb, he stood contentedly looking out at the pastoral scene before him. The garden plot surrounding the house was a riot of color and perfume. Roses, peonies, stock, and other summer flowers grew profusely here, and their beauty and fecundity added immeasurably to the sense of peace, of rightness, about this place.

Drawing deep breaths of the perfume-laden air, the young man straightened up and walked out onto the porch. Walking over to the railing, he rested his weight on both arms while looking out across the panoramic country-side. His eyes took in the rich fields beyond the garden, the checkered design of fertile black farmland interspersed with living, growing patches in a thousand subtly different shades of green.



Even though he knew the true work of the Home Farm took place in the large red, barn-like structures in the distance- structures in which hydroponic vats multiplied the farm yield by a factor of twenty-seven- this view of still rich land and of green produce never failed to move him emotionally. This land retained the appearance of what it had always been, and would, God willing, always remain- a rich and fertile farmland, the fabled land of milk and honey.

A step sounded behind him. He turned to face a woman in her early sixties. At five-four, she stood a full head shorter than he. She looked at him from gentle blue eyes still somewhat shadowed by recent sorrow. Her still lovely face was only now regaining its usual serenity.

"Daydreaming, son?"

"I was just thinking how lovely this is." He made a sweeping gesture that encompassed more than just the physical display of beauty spread before them. It included also the mood-of peace, the atmosphere of contentment.

Her glance followed the sweep of his hand. The understanding in her eyes as she turned back to him showed a deep appreciation of the things he had left unsaid. She herself said only, "Since your father brought me here forty-two years ago, I have thought this one of the most beautiful spots on the face of the Earth."

His eyes drank in the slumbrous beauty of the farm once again. Then he nodded his head slowly. "Yes, in its own quiet way this is, indeed, most beautiful." He paused then, a glib and facile man now face to face with a true and deep emotion. Mother is right, his thoughts ran, this is indeed most beautiful. There may be places where beauty catches at the heart more readily, or where it calls attention to itself more forcefully, but this--- this fills all my needs quietly, yet fully. He turned to her again, eyes saying what he could not.

She laid her hand over his where it rested again on the railing. A soft smile of ready sympathy lightened her grave face briefly. Aloud, her only response was, "I know, son, I know."

It was enough for her to say. Her son held her hand with his and continued talking. "Mother, these past few days I've come to know such contentment, I find myself at times forgetting just why I came home." He looked out across the fields once more to where a slender, youthful figure stood shoulder deep in green-gilt corn. He nodded toward the young boy. "And I fear Peter forgets, also."

With quiet dignity and innate wisdom, the woman responded, "Forget, Jim? No, we have none of us forgotten George and Aurelan. Nor shall we forget. But this is Earth, son. And if there is one lesson Earth imparts to her children, it is that life does go on. The Earth still abides, James."

Captain James T. Kirk of the *USS Enterprise* looked out across the still lovely and fertile farmland which he and his brother had known as children. Peter Kirk, his young nephew, chanced to look up at that moment. Seeing his uncle and grand-mother, he waved a greeting.

James returned Peter's wave, then nodded his head slowly in recognition of the validity of his mother's words. "Yes, that could be it. I've learned to accept Sam's and Aurelan's deaths in the past few days. They died, and I could do nothing at the time to save them. But their son is here, and will grow to manhood where Sam and I also grew up. Life does continue. There's a sense of continuity here, of life going ever onward."

Mrs. Kirk gave a faint smile again. "Son, you are so very like your father! You have gone, and you will go again, to the most distant stars--- but so long as you carry the memory of this small and insignificant world with you, all is well."

Jim Kirk cocked his head to one side as he pondered his mother's words. His brow furrowed with thought as he followed her meaning to its inner truth. Then he smiled ruefully, realizing that, although he might have explored the greater part of the known-galaxy, his roots were here, in this one small plot of land. And no matter how far he travelled, he had to return to that small Iowa farm now and then. Only by returning to the source of his strength could he renew himself, and gain the strength to go on. Jim nodded again, saying, "Yes, I see what you mean, Mother. And Sam--- Sam was also in need of the--- the continuance, the soul, found only here." His eyes again took in the sun-glistened beauty of the garden and the fields beyond.

Mrs. Kirk nodded agreement. "Yes, James, so it has ever been. The Kirks have always been a wandering tribe--- but with the need for strong roots, for tap-roots which can nourish their precious growth of freedom. Always the Kirks have carved out for themselves a strong-hold, a home-base from which to mount an assault on the frontier of the moment. And now, even though that frontier has expanded to take in the stars themselves, the need for home remains."

Jim watched as a young collie pup, an almost exact duplicate of the pet he and George Samuel had loved over twenty years ago, frisked up to Peter, who now lay stretched full-length beneath the shade-producing limbs of a gnarled

old apple-tree. "And Peter----will he also take the taste, the smell, the feel of Earth outward with him to the stars?"

A serene, private smile lit his mother's face. "No, Jim. I do not think so. Peter, I feel sure, is like me. Peter will stay here, a part of the soil and the land, a guardian of the hearth preserving tradition for yet another generation of explorers eager to push back the frontiers of knowledge."

"Yes, I can see that. I suppose, in a way, Peter will be happier than I. He'll always have the land, the soil, a... a beach to walk on."

"And eventually, Jim, because of the strength and security Peter gives to his family here at the Home Farm, the Kirks will again reach out to the stars. This," she gestured towards the golden-green luxury of the farmland, "is but a renewal of promise."

Jim nodded again as his eyes once more took in the sprawling, peaceful scene before him. Then he and his mother turned to enter the house. Home Farm had fulfilled its task of repair and revitalization. His major wound over his brother's death was now healing over, Captain James T. Kirk was ready to prepare for the return to his ship.

RONDEAU

by John Augustus Kirk (1856-1904), edited by Andrina Lewis

The song of the sea, with its haunting refrain,
Repeats its sweet echo despite my heart's plea.
It echoes, re-echoes, again and again -
The song of the sea.

I cannot escape it, nor think myself free
Of Lorelei's singing, as hushed as the rain
Caressing me now as I stand on the lea.

My love holds my hand, and she knows not the pain
I feel when she asks, "Do you stay now with me?"
How can I answer when I hear ever plain
The song of the sea.

(The above poem was discovered by Dr. Andrina Lewis, Starfleet historian, in the course of research for a biographical study of the Kirk family. It, more than any dry composition or study, will serve to throw light on certain hereditary characteristics of members of this famous family.

-Encyclopedia Terrestrial, Part Nine, Biographies.

A QUibble WITH TRIBBLES



by David Lubkin

It's only a friendly little tribble—and it destroyed two Klingon warships and a planetary ecology. 'Whence and what art thou, execrable shape?'

One Cyrano Jones, *entrepreneur extraordinaire*, stole a/the glommer, a creature supposedly genetically engineered by the Klingoni for pest control. He admitted to having been on a Klingon-ruled planet. How did he happen to be on the very planet the glommer was developed? How did he find out about it? How did Jones steal the tribble eradicator?

If one supposes that Cyrano was as he seemed to be, a harmless trader with a predilection for alcohol, then the only way he could have heard of and obtained the aforementioned creature is by having been captured by the Klingon authorities. One wonders how he managed to escape unscathed.

Klingoni have a well-deserved reputation for the efficiency and painfulness of their interrogation methods. By questioning Jones, they would have found the location of the home planet of the tribbles and, undoubtedly, as it is located in what they certainly would have construed as their territory, would subsequently have visited it.

They had made several hundred attempts before successfully creating the glommer. In lieu of these attempts, it would have been much simpler and far less expensive to export the tribble's natural predator, if such existed. If this alleged rapacious multiped was too violent for Klingoni to allow to roam freely, they would no doubt have developed and used a less virulent strain. The implication in *More Trouble, More Tribbles* was that the Klingoni had developed an entirely new breed of animal. The glommer was the result of long experimentation. If it had been created from an already extant predator, they would not have been so extreme in their efforts to recover the glommer. All they had to do was return to the home planet, obtain another pseudoglommer, and use whatever genetic methods worked the first time. Conclusion: either the Klingoni involved are stupid as hell, or the tribbles have only their native environment as predator.

What sort of planetary conditions can exist that would kill off extremely large numbers of tribbles in a brief period of time (I estimate a declination of 90% of the tribble population every twelve hours or so), require them to be flat ellipsoids with fur, no teeth, and a purring/shrieking mechanism, and allow them to exist, and, indeed, proliferate in a terrestrial environment?

Consider all the natural disasters known to mankind. The deadly ones. How many are either continual or recurring every ten to twelve hours? ... I'm still waiting. Through elaborate, arduous, and hopefully-but-not-bloody-likely consistent Aristotelian chains of logic, I eliminated all natural causes presently known to mankind (*translation: 'me'*). If the Reader wishes to propose some cause unknown to man, I beg forgiveness and ask my Noble Reader to (*expletive deleted*). This is meant to be a reasonable discussion based on what we know. ('sides, *Hodgkins Law of Parallel Planet Development would probably prove anything you might think up invalid...*)

Conclusion: not absolute, but damned plausible --- tribbles have no predators whatsoever (with the possible exception of J. Tomcat and Koloth). And because they do not, and as they are rather prolific, the only possible conclusion is that they are artificial creatures, created by some less-than-transcendental being for whatever reason.

As to these beings' motivation-- as pets, perhaps? Unlikely. Genetically program ecological disasters into your pets? Why? Unless... they are meant to be disasters. Consider if you will, agricultural warfare. A step beyond mere bacteriological-agricultural warfare. Semi-intelligent beings making nuisances of themselves in a myriad ways to supposedly intelligent species...

And yet, who was it that introduced tribbles to Known Space? Why, our old friend, Cyrano. There are three possibilities-- either Jones is a Federation agent, a Klingon agent, or he works for someone else (Himself, you say? Now really...). If he works for someone else, then he must be either genetically human-- as shown by McCoy's examination of Jones (an attempt to tell whether or not he was a Klingon agent), or some super-human being capable of fooling McCoy and the ship's computers. Somehow, I refuse to ascribe such disgracefulness in the former case to Bones. He knows that Kirk's entire career as well as his own (the matter involves medical research) rests on the result. You might postulate fallibility of Bones, due to the stress of the situation. Need I remind the Reader that the last time McCoy was guilty of such flagrant errors he was suffering from a supposedly incurable disease?

Could Jones really have been a Klingon agent? And the planetary ecological damage a mere fabrication? How does the Reader explain the destruction, validated elsewhere of two warships, and the gift of the glommer to the Federation? And why devise tribbles so that they like Terrans and Vulcans but despise Klingons? No, the only reasonable explanation is that Cyrano Jones was and is an agent of the United Federation of Planets.

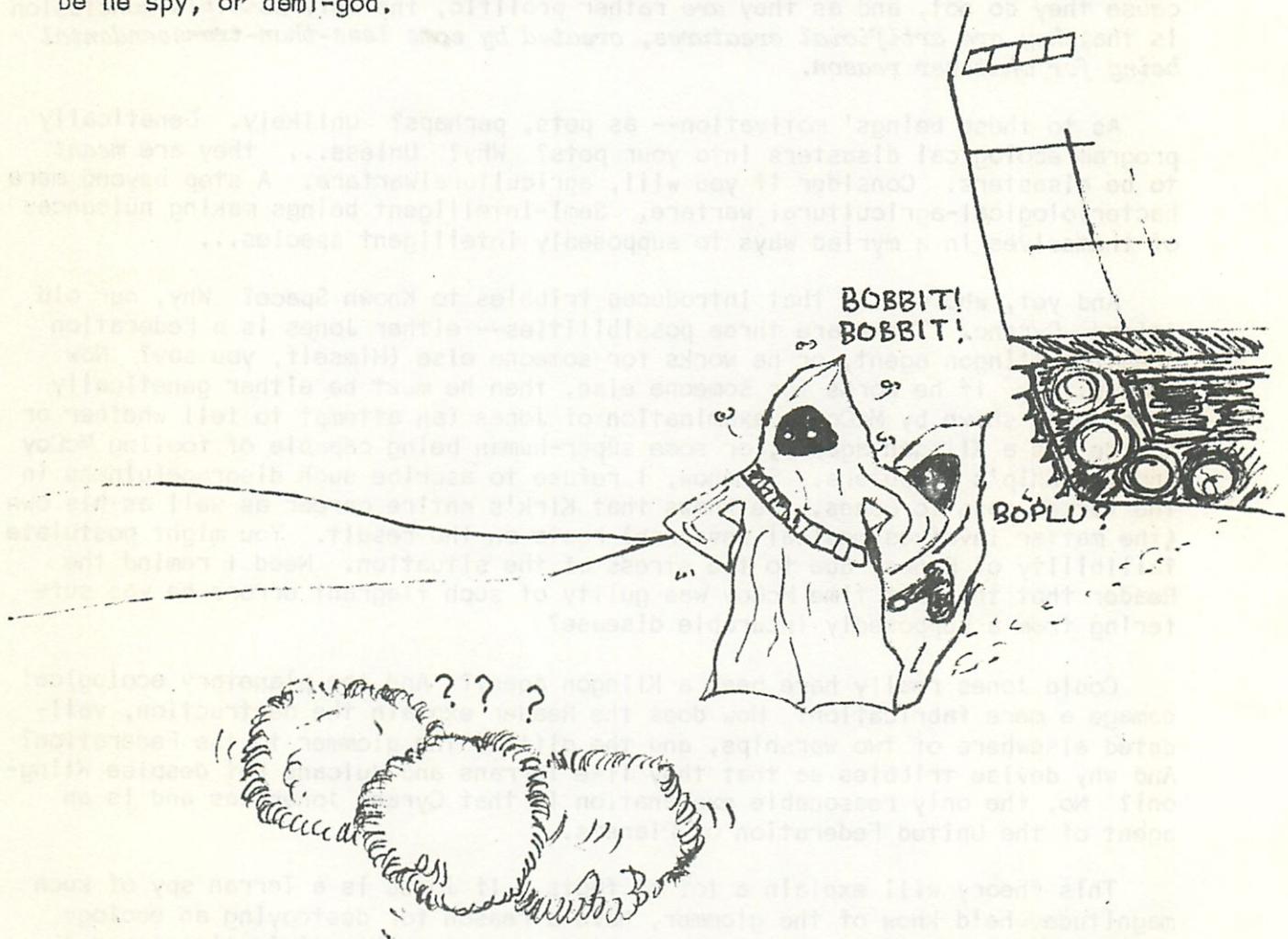
This theory will explain a lot of facts. If Jones is a Terran spy of such magnitude, he'd know of the glommer, have a reason for destroying an ecology, be capable of stealing a top-secret prototype, be capable of fooling several starships' captains, as well as twisting them around his fat finger, and be released so soon from K-7 (that always bothered me....).

The sples of real life are anything but flamboyant, usually quite ordinary. Cyrano strikes a golden mean because he seems so ordinary with his deliberately attention-grabbing speeches. And Kirk makes a perfect patsy and/or foil for him.

One supposition is that Baris was really also an agent, perhaps Jones' superior officer. The matter was of sufficient import that two undercover agents were needed. And again, obviousness and deliberately making a pest of himself keeps suspicion from the agent involved.

This exposition casts considerable doubt upon the character and good nature of the Federation. Such anti-Klingon action is in deliberate violation of the Organian Peace Treaty. The Federation must have viewed this as a last bid for power, with the hope that a solitary agent carrying "harmless little tribbles" would be unnoticed.

While most Readers will find more or less to quibble with my 'proof', it should be agreed that Cyrano is more than he seems. "The rabbit fondles his own harmless face," does he? Well, this is one fat rabbit I rather distrust-- be he spy, or demi-god.



OBLIGATORY TRIBBLE/STAR WARS CARTOON *Ron*

THE JACOBEAN CHRONICLES: PART TWO

by Janice Rand, edited by Andrina Lewis

1. Perplexedly, I watch
As you turn away.
Useless now to protest,
You have chosen to go.
Loving you, I watch you leave.
Clearly,
This is what you want,
Although I know not why.
Having no desire but to please you,
I shall not try to halt your flight.
Leave me, my unloving love;
Loving you, I bid you go.

2. How strange!
My heart feels naught.
A pall of fine-spun ice
Enfolds it,
Numbing it to joy and pain alike.
How fortunate,
~~Lest~~ the pain of you release my tears
To wash away the ice
And let me feel the agony of Hell
Which is life - without you.

3. Loving you,
I wish only to please you.
Therefore,
I shall say "Adieu,"
And not "revoir."
Not "Till then,"
But "Farewell."

Godspeed, my love;
Do not remember me
~~Lest~~ you begin to pity
And feel guilt.
I shall forgive the cavalier repulsion
Which you gave my heart -

Because I love,
I love!

4. With seeming nonchalance,
I watch you walk away
With casual backwards wave.
No thought you give
To what I do
Now you're not here.
Determinedly,
I match your casualness
In "friend-well-met"
Comaraderie.
I know my place.
You've taught me it.
I shall not again
My heart lay bare
That you may prod its core
With impersonal glance.
The best of friends is what
we'll be,
As you desire -

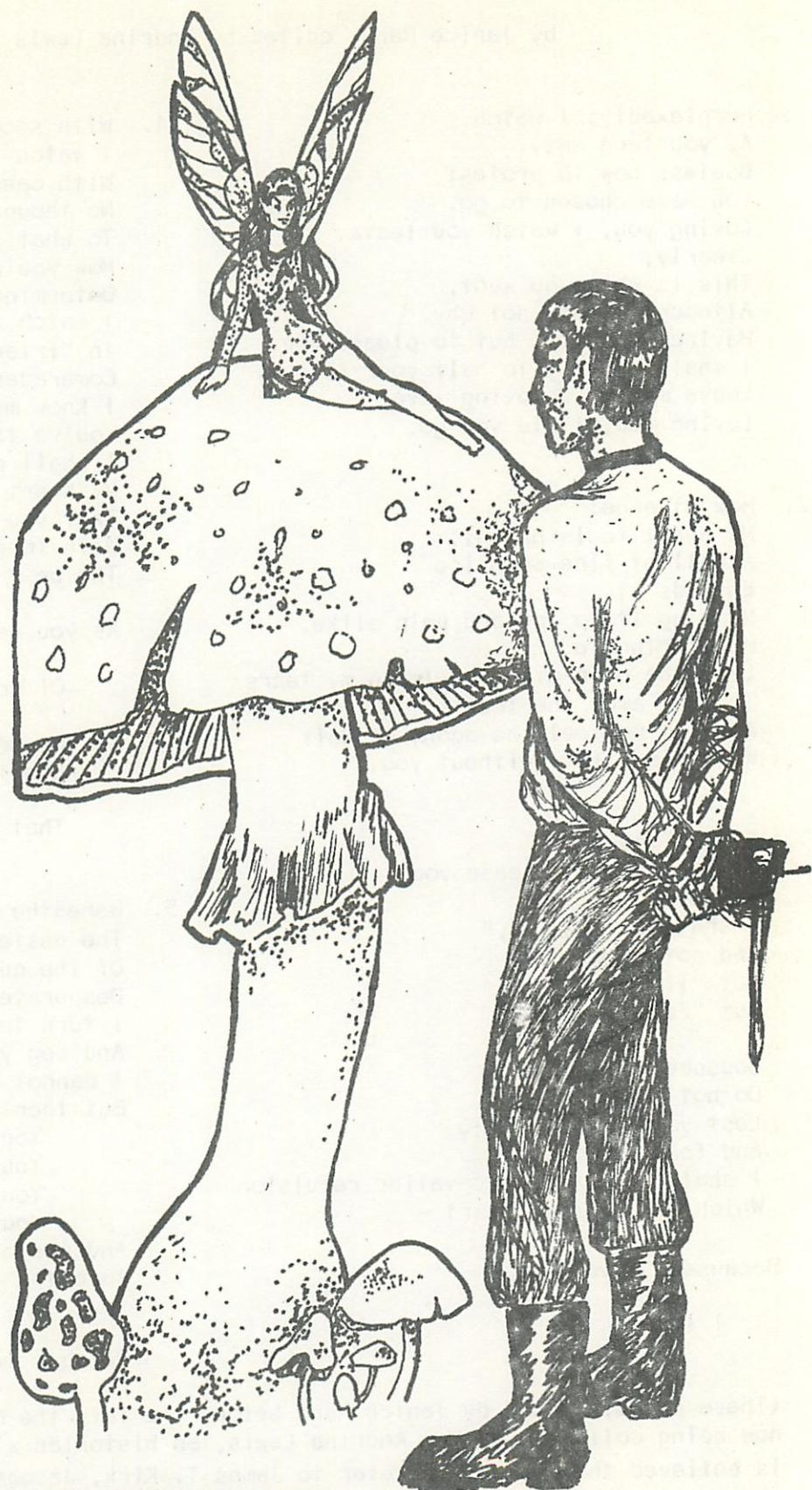
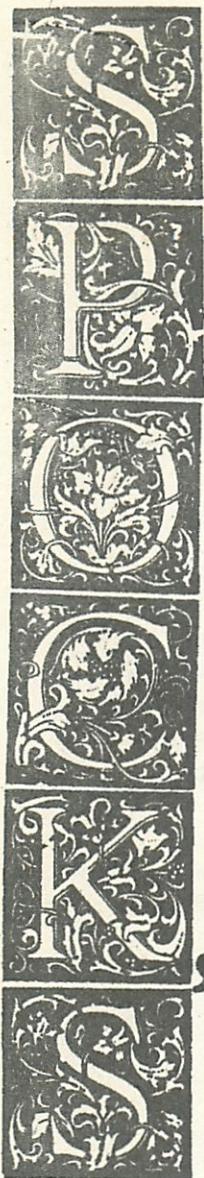
Of course, it may be ten
thousand years,
Or more,
Ere I forget to remember

That I love you.

5. Beneath my feet
The unsteady leverage
Of the quagmire of your love.
Desperately,
I turn to you
And beg you to release me;
I cannot free myself.
But then -
 You smile,
 You wink,
 You kiss me unawares,
 You are -
And I sink ever deeper
Into the quicksand of your
evasive love.

Release me!

(These poems, penned by Janice Rand before she left the *USS Enterprise*, are now being collected by Dr. Andrina Lewis, an historian with Starfleet. It is believed that the poems refer to James T. Kirk, Jacobean being the possessive form of James. Part One of the Chronicles appeared in *Sehlat's Roar* 5.)



by Elspeth Mosher

CAPTAIN'S LOG, STARDATE 4607.1:

Captain James T. Kirk reporting. We are in standard orbit around the planet Elysia. Initial reports from the exploration branch of Starfleet indicate that Elysia is eminently suited for colonization by humanoid populations. An Earth-Mars type planet, Elysia possesses many salient features. The climate is ideal for farming and related industries, the land is rich and arable. There are extensive farmlands, grasslands, and forests, as well as rich mineral deposits. There is an abundance of native life, but no indication of a native sapient race. So far as could be determined by the initial exploration team, Elysia is a true Eden.

The *Enterprise* has been ordered to escort a team of scientists to Elysia. They are to set up a permanent installation and run intensive tests of the planet's environment. Should their tests corroborate the initial reports, Elysia will be opened for colonization within the next five to ten years.

Mr. Spock has beamed down to the planet's surface with a landing party to run a final check on the site chosen for the survey camp. If everything goes according to plan, the permanent site will be set up within 48 hours, and our passengers will be beamed to their new home.

It had been a routine planet beam-down. Even Spock, who had grown wary of Eden-like planets, found himself relaxing in the sun's soothing warmth. Silver-green grass formed a lush carpet underfoot, and calendula-like flowers dotted this carpet at various intervals. Murmurous insect life was rife. Small field creatures popped their heads out of the grass from time to time, showing no signs of fear at sight of the landing party.

As he walked, Spock found himself thinking of that other Eden, *Omicron Ceti III*. But Elysia's sun produced no berthold rays, and no space-born symbiotic spores had become rooted in its soil. Inevitably, as they often did when he thought of that now-lost paradise, Spock's thoughts turned to the words with which his captain had broken his dependence on those spores. *Pointy eared elf who should be sitting on a mushroom.* The words no longer hurt, but their touch of whimsy continued to fascinate him. *A Vulcan elf... most illogical,* his thoughts continued.

Spock's curiosity, always one of his major characteristics, led him to explore a nearby grove of tall blue-green trees. He walked through the forested area, making notations from time to time of the native fauna and flora. His discerning eyes saw no sign of any overt danger which might imperil any future colony. A large clearing opened in front of Spock, and he paused in amazement. There, before his eyes, was a mushroom-like growth 2.89 meters tall. A minute being measuring .43 meters sat on top of the fungoid growth.

Were he completely human, Spock would have rubbed his eyes in disbelief. The tiny being was winged, but with wings so gossamer thin, it seemed impossible for even its slight weight to be lifted by them. The face and body structure of the tiny alien were identifiably female. She had long black hair which tumbled freely down her back. To add to the sense of unreality in the scene before him, her ears were pointed and her brows arched familiarly. Moreover, unbelievable though it was, she was dressed in a science officer's uniform--complete to the proper identifying insignia on the chest.

The surrealistic atmosphere was strengthened by the fact that she was putting to her mouth a small, silver, flute-like instrument. From this she was coaxing a song of almost unbearable sweetness, a primeval melody which twined its way around both emotion and intellect.

For more than 2000 years of recorded history, there had been no incidents of insanity in Spock's family. He rather doubted that he would be the first. *There must be a logical explanation for this phenomenon*, he thought as he surveyed the rather illogical apparition before him.

Spock unslung the tricorder from his shoulder. Pointing it at the giant mushroom and its tiny occupant, he took a reading. Both mushroom and female being registered strongly on his tricorder. Spock made a circular sweep of the area. His tricorder appeared to be in perfect working order. *It would appear the mushroom and its... its occupant are indeed present. Fascinating, but such a prompt response to my inner thoughts is, to say the least, rather disquieting.* Frowning slightly, Spock unhooked his communicator.

Keeping a wary eye on the tiny alien, Spock flipped open the sending grid on his communicator. "Dr. McCoy, come in please."

"Sickbay. What is it, Spock?" questioned the chief medical officer of the Enterprise.

"Dr. McCoy, please take a life-form reading of this area to within a 700 meter radius."

There was a pause, then the doctor's voice came over Spock's communicator. "Readings taken, Spock. What specific information do you require?"

"What readings are in my exact proximity?"

"Readings are identical to the general planet readings taken before beam-down. Insects, smaller animal forms. Nothing particularly unusual or outstanding."

Spock frowned thoughtfully. "Doctor, could you be a little more specific in your readings?"

"Well, you are within a small glade. The other five members of the landing party have scattered and are outside your requested 700 mile radius. In your immediate vicinity are several creatures analogous to field mice, moles, rabbits, insects, birds, and such. Now, is that sufficiently specific, or", McCoy's voice became laced with sarcasm, "do you want me to tell you how many fleas are on the fur of the rabbit watching your scientific nonsense from the shade of the third tree to your right?"



Spock ignored the doctor's rather emotional response-- although he did, surreptitiously, glance over to the forest from where a small rabbit was, indeed, regarding him with bright eyes. A rather interesting example of parallel planet development, he thought. Aloud he asked, "There was no indication of sentient life, or of a humanoid life form?"

"Spock, you know very well I'd have told you if there were."

The Vulcan First Officer raised a quizzical brow. "There seems to be an anomaly, doctor. I am presently looking at a small Vulcan elf. She registers on my tricorder as a living, sentient being. Yet you tell me that you have no record of her existence on the ship's instruments. There is, of course, the added problem that elves do not exist in Vulcan tradition. I am, therefore, somewhat at a loss to account for her."

The pause from the *Enterprise* was longer this time. Then Dr. McCoy's worried voice came through. "Spock, it's been two-and-a-half years since your last shore-leave. You're over-worked, over-tired. I'd suggest..."

Dr. McCoy, I am not hallucinating. Directly in front of me is a small elf seated on a large mushroom."

McCoy's voice, sounding even more worried than before, came through to him again. "An elf. Seated on a mushroom. Spock, if you're not hallucinating, you must be joking."

"Vulcans do not joke, doctor."

"So you keep telling me. But the alternative is that you've finally warped that precisely honed Vulcan mind to the point where it's short-circuited. I'm coming down, Spock. Stay there."

A brief pause, then McCoy's voice added as an after-thought, "And keep that blasted elf there, too."

Spock made no immediate response to McCoy. He closed his communicator and replaced it on his belt. Then he took another series of tricorder readings for comparative purpose. The results were the same. Nodding his head thoughtfully, Spock closed his tricorder and slung it over his shoulder. Then, folding his arms, he waited patiently for McCoy to appear.

Within moments, a golden column of sparkling light appeared within the glade. This immediately coalesced into the solid form of the ship's chief surgeon.

"Now just where the..." McCoy's voice died out as his startled eyes took in the appearance of the tiny elf seated on the huge mushroom. "Good lord, Spock! You were right."

"But, of course."

McCoy held his medi-kit scanner up to the tiny alien. "She registers on this, Spock. I don't understand. I tell you, nothing uncommon, or even remotely resembling this scene registers on ship's instrumentation."

"Doctor, I am as at a loss to explain this untoward event as you are."

McCoy stood in silent contemplation. Then he turned to Spock. "Spock, it could just be that I've been associating with you too long. I could be sharing in your hallucination."

Spock gave a small sigh would have symbolized extreme exasperation in a human being. "Doctor, Vulcans do not hallucinate."

"I grant you, she appears real. But why doesn't she register on ship's instruments? All systems were overhauled two months ago and are in perfect working order."

During this interchange, the little elf had stopped playing her musical instrument. With her head cocked to one side, she appeared to be avidly listening to the conversation of the two officers. A definite gleam of intelligence could be seen in her eyes as she listened. Spock took note of this fact. Turning to McCoy he asked, "Exactly how does one go about introducing one's self to an elf?"

McCoy looked at him askance. I have absolutely no idea of the proper protocol, Spock. Shall we simply go up to her and introduce ourselves?"

The two officers approached the huge mushroom. With typical Southern gallantry, McCoy swept a deep, gracious bow in the direction of the elven being. Straightening up, he addressed the tiny sprite with the vowels of his Georgia home-land honey-rich in his voice, saying, "Ma'am, I am Leonard McCoy of the *USS Enterprise*. My companion is Mr. Spock, its First Officer. Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

The elf broke into a delicious tinkle of laughter. That laughter was everything that every fairy-tale of earth had ever promised it to be. Sun-light and moon-light, silver mists and golden fruit were all contained in that laughter.

The elf's tiny wings began to beat the air. Despite their seeming fragility, the wings lifted her into the air above the mushroom. She swooped and soared around the two *Enterprise* officers. Then, like a huge dragon-fly, she hovered in the air in front of Spock. Wordlessly, the two confronted one another from jet eyes set beneath identical brows. Then she

gave another gurgle of laughter and disappeared completely from sight.

McCoy looked at his medi-scanner in disbelief. There had been no sign of any energy transfer at the moment of her disappearance. One moment she was there, the next moment she was not. "Spock," he asked resignedly, "What have you gotten me into now?"

"I fail to understand your meaning, doctor. The alien being we saw is a fact. Our portable instruments definitely recorded her presence. Our job is determine by what agency ship's instrumentation were kept unaware of her existence."

McCoy looked at First Officer Spock in silence for several minutes more. Then, shaking his head, he said, "Spock, if I know my Vulcans-- and, after all these years I am finally beginning to-- we'll soon discover that you had *every* thing to do with both her existence and her disappearance,

"Your words are unfounded and illogical," Spock said, but his thoughts ran along different channels. *Strange how humans can often reach an answer that approaches the truth by taking quantum leaps over the process of logic. There is no way the doctor can know that the elf was brought into existence in response to my thoughts. Is this another of his 'hunches'?*

McCoy eyed Spock steadily, then replied, "Perhaps. However, I have the intuitive feeling that I'll be proven correct."

Spock refused to comment. Instead, he unslung his tricorder again and made a systematic search of the glade. He was looking for some clue, some hint into the nature of the tiny alien.

McCoy stood to one side, a gently sardonic smile on his face as he watched Spock search fruitlessly.

Spock looked up. "Are you not going to assist me, doctor?"

McCoy gave a very exaggerated sigh. "All right, Spock. But it won't do any good." He did indeed help Spock with his search. However, he did so with such an air of exaggerated reluctance that, momentarily, human irritation threatened to break through Spock's Vulcan calm.

At last, tacitly admitting that McCoy had been right in his final supposition, Spock said, "I think that is all we can do down here. Let us return to the *Enterprise*, and obtain the help of the ship's computers."

McCoy agreed readily, and stood by patiently while Spock contacted the other members of the landing party.

Spock's questioning revealed that none of the other landing party members had sighted anything out of the ordinary. They admitted that the scientific information they had gathered had not yet been collated or analyzed, but to them, Elysia was still Eden-- an Eden devoid of elves, Vulcan or otherwise. Spock directed all five members of the landing party to meet him at the original beam-down site, then turned to McCoy. "Doctor?"

Spock and McCoy set out to rejoin the crew. At the last minute, Spock turned to look at the glade one more time. Both brows raised in extreme sur-

prise. For precisely 1.37 minutes the glade was filled with a glowing, golden nimbus. Uncharacteristically, he blinked his eyes, and the glow disappeared. Spock shrugged mentally. This was one more piece to the puzzle that was Elysia.

* * * * *

Boma and Jaeger were already at the beam-down site when McCoy and Spock arrived. Rodriguez arrived almost simultaneously with the senior officers. They waited several minutes longer for the final members of the landing party to appear. Barrows and Suu did not arrive, however. A faint frown on his face, Spock sent a signal out to the two missing crew-members. There was no response on any wave-band of the communicator.

Meanwhile, McCoy had been deep in thought. He looked up at Spock's failure to contact Barrows or Sulu.

"Spock, do you think this could be another 'shore-leave' planet?"

Spock thought deeply for a minute. *Shore leave planet? Indeed. Such a possibility would some of the anomalies I have discovered to date.* He nodded. That may account for the inexplicable events we have experienced thus far, doctor. Although we have not seen a Keeper, that does not entirely negate your supposition."

McCoy nodded in turn. It would also help to explain the sudden disappearance of two of the most overly romantic members of the *Enterprise* crew."

"Overly romantic?"

Yes, Spock. Overly romantic. Barrows envisions herself a fairy-tale princess and Sulu has a deeply felt desire to be a swash-buckling musketeer or a knight of old. If this is a 'shore-leave' planet, can you *imagine* what the android providers would be capable of creating for our merriment with the combined imagination of those two to draw on?"

Despite his Vulcan heritage, Spock gave a visible shudder. All too vividly he now recalled certain past incidents in which Sulu and Barrows had figured only too prominently-- incidents which only underscored the deep-rooted romanticism which lay beneath the external scientific proficiency of Lt. Itaka Sulu and Ensign Tonia Barrows. Spock looked around with a slight grimace of distaste, almost as though anticipating fire-breathing dragons or talkative white rabbits to appear suddenly. Neither dragons nor white rabbits appeared. Nor did Sulu and Barrows.

The problem was assuming major proportions. Spock took out his communicator and contacted the *Enterprise*. "Spock to transporter room. Spock to transporter room."

"Transporter Chief Kyle, here. Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"Five to beam up, Mr. Kyle."

"Yes, sir."

* * * * *

Beam-up was accomplished without any difficulty. Once in the main transporter room, Spock dispatched the members of the landing party to their various functions. Boma, Jaeger, and Rodriguez were to transfer the data they had gathered to ship's computers and begin to compile the statistics necessary for the final determination of the status of the planet.

Calling McCoy over, Spock said, "Doctor, I suggest we go to the bridge and let the Captain know of the recent activities on Elysia's surface. We will then be able to initiate a search for Sulu and Barrows."

Spock and McCoy took the turbo-lift to the bridge. During the entire trip they remained silent, Spock pondering on the events of the last hour, McCoy locked in his own thoughts. The turbo-lift doors opened at the bridge and McCoy and Spock stepped out.

"Jim, you'll never believe..." McCoy began, but his voice died out as the entire bridge crew winked out of existence. Where there had been a scene of bustling activity there was now a totally empty, echoing bridge. McCoy turned to Spock. "Spock, I think our hallucination is spreading."

"Doctor, this time you may be even more correct than you think."

The two senior officers of the *Enterprise* began a systematic search of the bridge. Spock, extremely well-read, and versed in various oddities, was reminded of the mystery of the *Marie Celeste* and other such "ghost ships". The bridge was completely deserted, yet there were no signs of violence, no signs of any danger remaining to threaten Spock or McCoy. All looked as though the bridge crew had stepped away momentarily. One of Uhura's earrings was still lying on the communications board. A small pocket calculator had been propped against the engineering console. The Captain's chair still swung back and forth, as though being given impetus by his body.

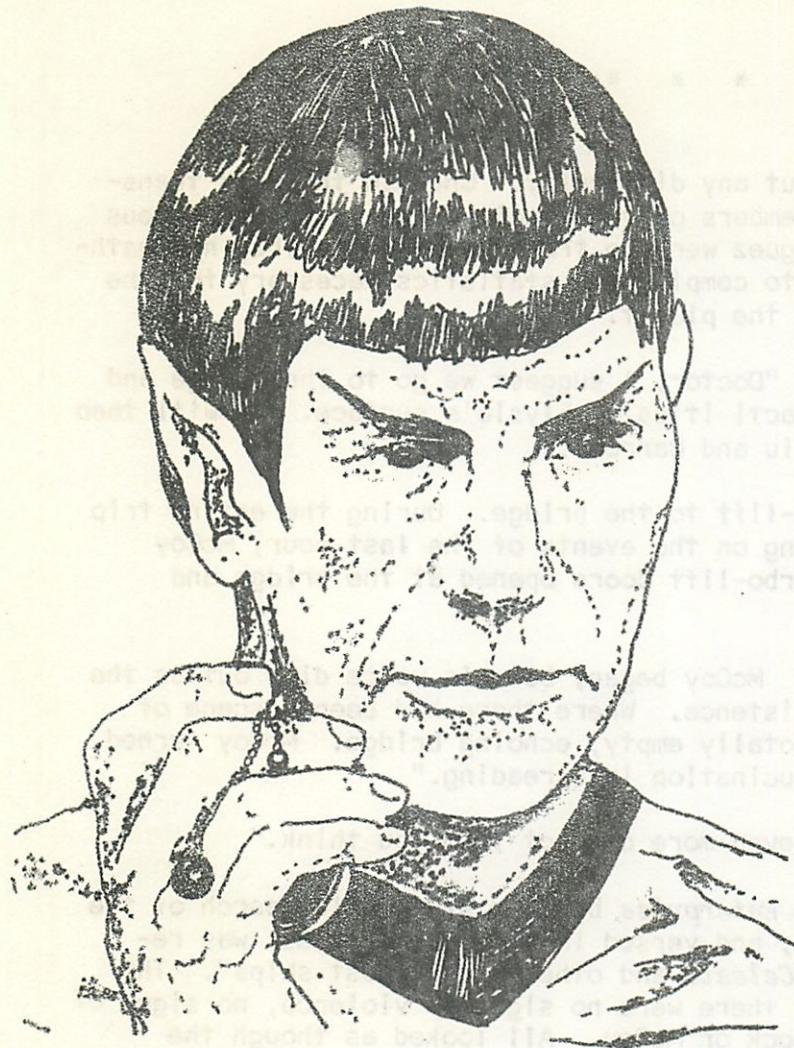
"Spock, if we ever clear this up, I'm turning us both in for a five month sick leave."

"I am sure that will not be necessary, Doctor. There must be a logical explanation underlying these events. Do you recall anything that may help us understand these seemingly inexplicable events?"

McCoy frowned thoughtfully. "I didn't like to mention it at the time, because I was half afraid it might really be part of an hallucination, but when our bridge crew disappeared, I could've sworn I heard the laughter of our little elven friend from the mushroom."

Spock slowly nodded his head. "I, also, thought I heard such a sound."

Spock walked over to the communications console. He called Chief Engineer Scott and ordered him to the bridge with a full back-up crew after tersely explaining the situation. Then he contacted Boma, Jaeger, and Rodriguez. Since returning to their respective laboratories, none of the three had observed any unprecedented incidents, and all were enthusiastic about the data they had recovered on the planet.



earrings on duty. However, with the sensitivity that had been heightened by so many years of interaction with humans, he knew that the very individualism which caused her to wear such items of personal adornment while on duty also made her the outstanding officer she was.

Thoughtfully fingering the earring the while, Spock opened all frequencies on the communications board. A random check of ship's services and personnel revealed that, with the exception of the bridge, all appeared to be normal.

Spock looked over to where McCoy was standing. The doctor was shaking his head from side to side slowly. "I've told you, Spock, you're the source of the hallucination. The only reason I'm staring at it is because I'm here with you."

Spock refused to comment on McCoy's deliberately provocative remarks. He continued to bemusedly run his fingers up and down the shiny surface of Uhura's earring as he tried to make some sense of the last few chaotic hours. There must be a logical pattern to all of this. If I add all the factors, I should be able to sense where events are leading. The elf. The disappearance of the bridge crew. The planetary anomalies our science survey team has discovered. The misreadings of our ship's sensors. What pattern can I discern from this?

He closed his hand thoughtfully over the bauble. Someone, or some thing, has gone to a great deal of trouble to set up this situation. An elf, and an almost magical disappearance. Magical? Of course!

"Sir, there is massive evidence of recent extensive terra-forming," reported Boma.

"And, Mr. Spock, I can find no evidence of animal or fossil remains prior to 25 years ago," Jaeger added.

Rodriguez concurred with the reports from his fellow officers and contributed, "Sir, I've noticed some very subtle hints of meteorological anomalies that could result from climate control."

Spock raised a brow. "On an uninhabited planet? Interesting."

Spock closed the communications channels. Silently, he stared down at Uhura's golden earring, mute testimony to the actual existence of the Bantu Communications Officer. Spock knew that, technically, Uhura was out of uniform when she wore her

Turning to McCoy, he asked, "Are you going to accompany me, doctor?"

"Where?"

By this time Spock was half-way to the turbo-lift door. "Back to the planet," he threw over his shoulder.

McCoy shrugged. "For what good it'll do, Spock, I'm right behind you."

Scott arrived at that moment with his back-up crew, and Spock turned the con over to him. Spock and McCoy entered the turbo-lift and within seconds were delivered to the main transporter room. Transporter Chief Kyle was still on duty. Spock walked over to the main control console of the transporter. He and Kyle talked quietly together several minutes, then Spock began to lay in an intricate pattern on the transporter board. Spock turned to McCoy. "Doctor, I suggest that we don life-support suits."

"Life-support-suits? Spock, it's an Eden-like climate down there!"

"Doctor, please humor me in this request. If you must, I have a-- a 'hunch' that life-support suits may be vital to our continued existence."

McCoy gave Spock a look that spoke of shock, but gave no more arguments. He put on one of the seldom-used life-support suits, as did Spock. Both men then mounted the transporter platform. Kyle worked the controls of the pre-set transporter. Spock felt a familiar tingling sensation. At his side he could see McCoy sparkle into nothingness. Before he himself was disintegrated by the energies of the beams, Spock looked over to where Kyle still stood at the transporter board, a look of utter amazement and complete disbelief on his face. Quickly, before the *Enterprise* was completely lost to his view, Spock followed the path of Kyle's gaze. There, doubled up with laughter, was the tiny sprite from the planet below.

So, he thought with pleasure, I must be nearing the truth.

* * * * *

On Elysia's surface, two columns of glowing light slowly solidified into the forms of the senior officers of the *USS Enterprise*. They had transported into the middle of a fiercely raging storm. A storm of such overwhelming intensity had not been noted on all of Elysia by earlier observations.

McCoy, completely startled by the break in anticipated weather conditions, took a scanner reading. He turned to Spock in amazement. "Spock, this is a highly corrosive storm formed by charged particles of sulphuric acid being whipped about by gale strength winds. How, in heaven's name, could such a storm even exist on Elysia? It's totally impossible by all the laws of nature that we know. There's absolutely no geo-physical evidence that any such physical event as is happening to us now is even remotely possible on this planet. Without these suits we'd have been destroyed by now. Your 'hunch' was right."

Spock did not appear gratified that his 'hunch' had indeed proven out. Instead, he appeared more worried than ever.

Spock took out his tricorder. Special protective coating, routine on all instruments used as frequently as the tricorder, preserved it from the corrosive elements raining down on them. The Vulcan played his tricorder in a wide circle. Gradually, as he made more and more adjustments on his instrument, Spock began to swing in a smaller and smaller arc. At last, he held his tricorder steadily in front of him.

"Doctor, shall we proceed?"

McCoy, still numbed by the sheer impossibility of the brutal storm in which they found themselves, could only nod silently. The two starship officers set out on their quest.

Elysia was, at this moment, anything but an Eden. They were still being buffeted by howling, demon-driven winds of hurricane force, and the corrosive rain was hitting upon them with a driving force. Through this maelstrom Spock and McCoy made their way. The next three hours were torturous and grueling.

McCoy at one point remarked that it was as though the planet, repenting of having shown them such a friendly, smiling face on their first beam-down, was now determined to show them her worst side. Spock nodded thoughtfully at these words, but said nothing. They continued on. The terrain over which they were traveling became more and more difficult to traverse. What had appeared on their first visit to be a protective copse of trees beckoning for exploration, was now a looming, threatening forest towering before them.

Nevertheless, they entered the forest. As they did so, the noise of the storm abated until they could no longer hear it.

It was obvious, however, that their troubles were far from over. They had not proceeded more than 100 yards into the forest when a lumbering, bear-like creature eight feet tall attacked without warning. McCoy was picked up over the creature's head and flung to one side as easily as though he were a rag-doll. Spock warily circled the being, trying to find an opening so that he could reach the creature's neck and deliver a nerve pinch. Clumsy though the being was, however, it always managed to avoid Spock's searching fingers.

So engrossed did he become in the encircling movement he and the bear-like creature were engaged in, that Spock became careless. He tripped over an exposed root, was unable to recover his balance, and fell to the ground. In an instant, the bear-creature was on top of him.

McCoy, groggily shaking his head as he recovered from being thrown about by the bear-creature, saw the predicament Spock was in. As Spock was in such close proximity to the bear-creature, McCoy hesitated to draw his phaser. He looked around for some implement he could use as a weapon. In desperation, he picked up a large rock and went over to his comrade's defense. Raising the rock, McCoy brought it down on the bear-creature's head as forcefully as possible. The unequal battle was ended. McCoy threw the rock to one side, and helped Spock to his feet. "Are you all right, Spock?"

"I believe I shall survive, Doctor. Shall we proceed?" Spock bent to pick up the tricorder, which had been knocked to the ground during his struggle with the bear-beast. He then turned, intent on continuing the journey.

McCoy looked after him, a wry smile on his face. His lips moved silently. "Thank you, doctor," McCoy mouthed to himself, knowing that the Vulcan would never use so human an expression. At that moment, Spock turned around.

"I believe the proper phrasing would be 'thank you', doctor." Spock then turned once more to continue.

McCoy's surprise effectively silenced him again. Giving only a small shake to his head, he set out after Spock. They continued onward. The ground was gradually sloping upward. As the altitude increased, the trees became sparser and sparser.

Although the forest was thinning, danger was not becoming less. From the forest around them there continued to come unknown, threatening, somewhat frightening noises. Fierce noises, snarls, growls, bore witness to the fact that they were being kept under continuous surveillance by the denizens of the forest.

Spock's tricorder continued to be their only guide. At last they came to what appeared to be the end of the forest. A mountain, with an almost vertical face fronting them, stood before them. Spock pointed to a cave opening about a quarter of the way up. "I would estimate, doctor, that that cavern is our destination."

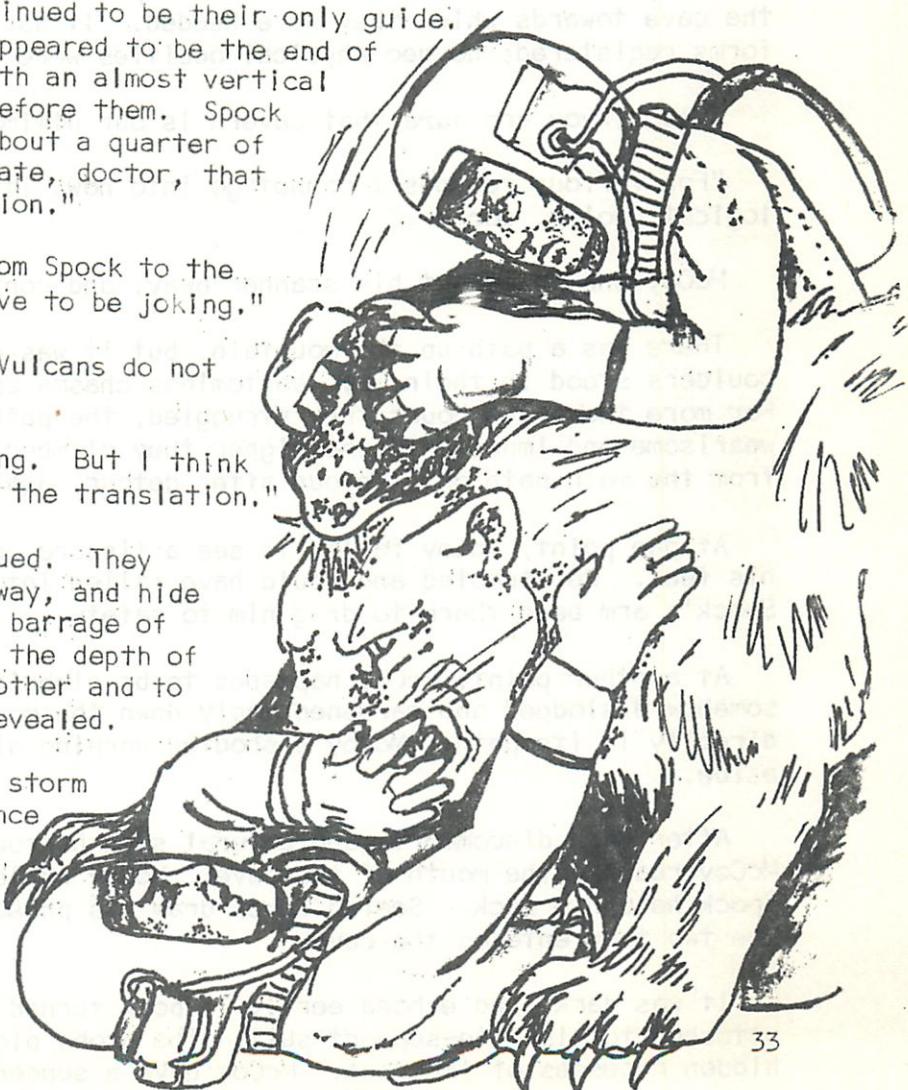
McCoy looked slowly from Spock to the towering mountain. "You have to be joking."

"For the 2347th time--Vulcans do not joke."

"So you're always saying. But I think something's getting lost in the translation."

Spock and McCoy continued. They attempted to lighten their way, and hide their true feelings, with a barrage of persiflage. But even then, the depth of their commitment to one another and to James T. Kirk was clearly revealed.

Although the sulphuric storm had passed with their entrance into the forest, both officers had kept their life-support suits. Once again, McCoy found himself thankful that Spock had had so human a 'hunch' as to wear the suits to Elysia's



surface. With heart-stopping suddenness, a fog sprang up to surround them. A quick scan of the fog showed it to be comprised of millions of droplets of Dicorrosium 37, one of the most corrosive poisons ever discovered.

"Spock, if we're out in this fog more than seven hours, our life-support suits will be eaten away."

"Six-point-nine-seven hours, to be precise," Spock interjected.

"Hmmmm. If you could foresee the troubles we'd meet on Elysia's surface, why didn't you set us down closer to our final destination?"

"I could only ensure that we would be set down in a position as close as possible to our original beam-down point, yet halfway between the point of last contact with Barrows and Sulu. At that time, I had no positive proof that I would be able to ascertain a definite direction for us to follow. We were most fortunate that I was able to trace a recognizable pattern to that cavern." Spock pointed again in the direction in which they were heading.

McCoy took out his scanner and attempted to get a general read-out of the cave towards which they were headed. It was impossible. No life forms registered; no geo-physical oddities were pronounced.

"Spock, you are *sure* that cavern is our ultimate destination?"

"For various reasons I cannot go into now, it does appear to be the logical choice, doctor."

McCoy shrugged, put his scanner away, and continued the upward trek.

There was a path up the mountain, but it was extremely arduous. Huge boulders stood in their way, bottomless chasms opened beneath their feet. For more than five hours they struggled, the path growing even more wearisome and impassable the higher they climbed. They were forced aside from the main path onto detour after detour, again and again.

At one point, McCoy failed to see a fissure opening suddenly beneath his feet. He stumbled and would have fallen into the chasm had not Spock's arm been there to drag him to safety.

At another point, McCoy happened to be glancing upward when a boulder somehow dislodged and careened madly down the mountainside, with Spock directly in its path. McCoy's shouted warning allowed Spock to jump aside.

After much discomfort, and several such harrowing escapes, Spock and McCoy reached the mouth of the cave. McCoy would have rushed inside, but Spock held him back. Seeing Spock draw his phaser, McCoy did likewise. The two then entered the cave.

It was dark, and echoed eerily. Spock turned on the light probe attached to his life-support suit. The probe picked out the corners and hidden recesses of the cave. McCoy gave a sudden start. Two brilliant

red flashes stood out in bold relief in the light of the probe. There was a sudden roar, a belch of smoke, and red and blue flames shot into the air.

Spock looked at McCoy with a slightly raised brow. However, "Fascinating" was his only comment.

As if in response, a second ear-shattering roar was given by the dragon. Alerted, Spock and McCoy set their phasers on stun. The dragon shook his head from side to side, pawed the earth, and gave another nerve-breaking roar. He then sprang forward in attack. Both officers jumped to one side and fired their phasers. There was no effect on the dragon. Immediately, Spock ordered McCoy to increase the setting on his phaser. He himself followed suit.

They were only in time. At that moment, the dragon swung around and recharged. Once again the star-ship officers were able to leap aside, avoiding the dragon's taloned claws and fiery breath. However, McCoy was dashed to one side by the tip of the dragon's tail as it was flicked in passing.

Again, the dragon showed no effect from the phaser fire. Slowly, reluctantly, Spock set his phaser on kill. Holding his phaser steady, he opened fire on the dragon, now across the cavern floor and gazing steadily back at them, tail lashing madly back and forth all the while.

Even on full strength, the phaser had no effect on the dragon. The coruscating light from the phaser played around the body of the dragon, setting off its iridescent beauty. But there was no harm done to the beast itself.

Thoughtfully, Spock stopped firing. Taking advantage of the dragon's cessation of overt hostility, Spock went over to McCoy, now picking himself up from the ground. Other than minor contusions and abrasions, McCoy was uninjured.

"Doctor, our phasers fail to have any effect on the dragon. Unless you happen to have a magical sword hidden among your medical supplies, I suggest we search for an alternative plan of action."

"Magical? Spock, do you suppose...? No, that would be ridiculous."

"Doctor, the probability is 87.976 that your supposition is correct. Indeed, that is the working hypothesis under which I found this cavern. This planet does, indeed, function under the rules of magic."

"I don't quite follow that, Spock. What do you mean, you made use of the rules of *magic* in order to find this cave???"

"Each link in the chain of events leading to the ultimate disappearance of the bridge crew appeared much too fortuitous. Each event seemed calculated to make us believe in the existence of some magical creature. I decided to try a little magic of my own. On all planets where magic is a way of life, two of the main elements of magic are Contingency and Identity. I used Uhura's golden earring to bring us to this cavern. I be-

"...believe most strongly that she is, indeed here. Further, we have a 94.89 percent chance of finding the entire bridge crew with her."

McCoy shook his head in complete disbelief. "I must be unconscious. Either that or I'm really hallucinating! I never thought I'd see the day when First Officer Spock would imply a belief in anything so illogical as magic."

"You are misinterpreting the situation, doctor. Magic is not illogical. Magic has its own form of logic... a logic which we are not always capable of understanding. On this planet, the logic of magic appears to function properly."

McCoy frowned thoughtfully. "...You state that Identity is one of the basic components of a working relationship with magic?"

"That is correct. Knowing the correct Identity of any being enables one to exhibit a certain amount of control over that being."

"Then, if we knew the real name of that dragon, we'd be able to control him!"

"Indeed, doctor, that would appear to be indicated by all of the magical sources I have read."

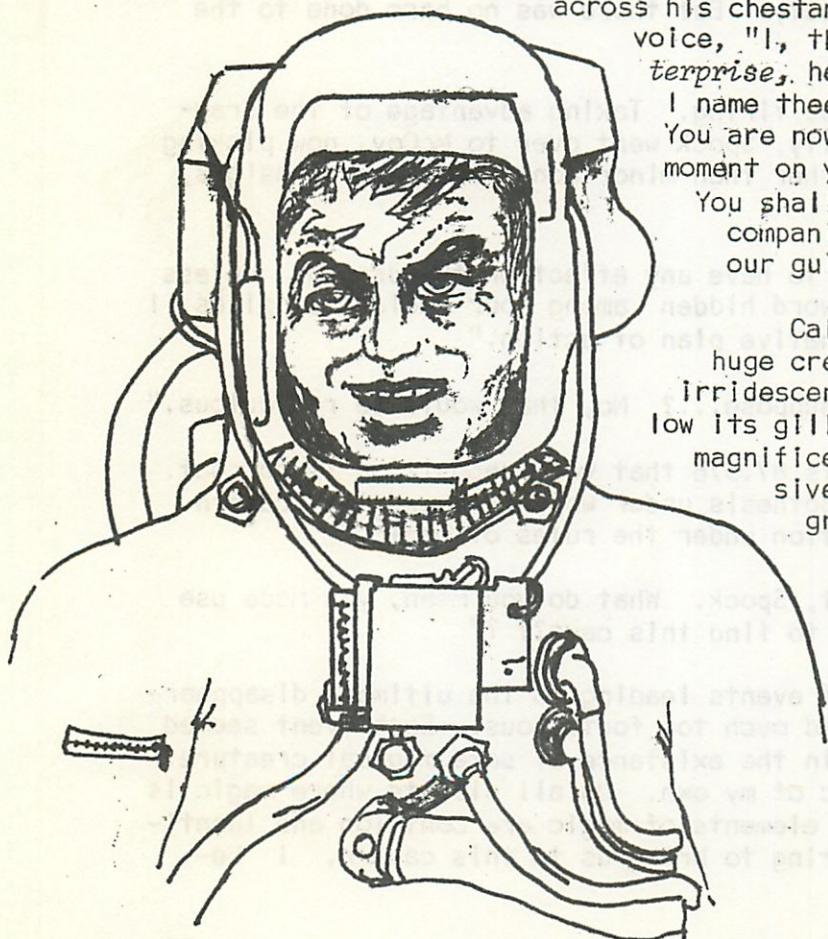
McCoy stood up and dusted off his hands. Ignoring Spock's restraining hand, he walked out to the center of the cavern floor. He folded his arms across his chest and announced in a sonorous voice, "I, the Chief Surgeon of the *Uss Enterprise*, hereby invoke thee to obey me. I name thee Mordred-Androcles-MacPhinn. You are now under my command. From this moment on you will obey me implicitly. You shall harm neither myself nor my companion, but rather shall serve as our guide and protector."

Calmly, McCoy walked up to the huge creature. He began to scratch the iridescent skin of the dragon right below its gill structure. The dragon was a magnificent beast, and more than impressive. In the probe lights it shone green and purple, blue and red.

Now, however, this majestic creature lowered its head and batted McCoy in the chest with a friendly gesture.

McCoy turned to Spock. "I think we'll be safe now."

Spock for once was speechless. McCoy took pity



on the First Officer. "Mordred-Androcles MacPhinn is Tonia's pet. Your being able to find this cave in the first place seemed to indicate that Uhura, at least, must be in the area. I decided to take the chance that Tonia Barrows would be here also. And, I assure you, If Barrows is on any planet where magic or a reasonable facsimile has a possibility of working, Mordred is not far behind."

Spock nodded. "Most logical."

Both officers, accompanied now by Mordred, entered the deeper, darker recesses of the cave. The corrosive fog had faded to nothingness at the cave's entrance, but caution made them retain their life-support suits. Their probe lights, and an occasional smoky belch of fire from Mordred, provided the only light.

The path they were following gradually narrowed. At last they came to a section of rockslide through which Mordred would be unable to press his large body. Spock took a tricorder reading of the area ahead.

"A passage-way opens up just a few hundred meters ahead. If our phasers are functional, we may be able to blast these walls in such a manner that Mordred will be able to accompany us."

McCoy readily agreed. The two officers took out their phasers. Each pointed at an opposite wall. They pressed the firing studs. Nothing happened. *The damping field must still be in effect*, mused Spock.

McCoy turned to Mordred. "You'll have to return to the outer cavern, old dragon chum." Mordred gave what might have passed for an assenting response. He shifted his body in the tight confines of the passage-way, and began to make his way upward.

Spock and McCoy continued downward. They quickly found the area where the passage-way opened out again, and followed the ever widening path. Then, with a suddenness that left them breathless, the two came on a swiftly moving underground river that cut completely across their way. It would be impossible

to swim across its dangerous currents, but Spock thought it might be possible to float across on rafts made from their life-support suits. The two officers stripped off their suits, inflated them, lashed them together, and launched them. They were buffeted, dashed, and battered about in the current. However, they were able to keep pace with one another, and managed to guide the suit-rafts to the opposite bank. Here they were able to lever themselves out of the water with the aid of an out-cropping of rock. They lay on the farther bank for several minutes, even Spock breathing heavily with exertion.

Spock and McCoy dragged their life-support suits out of the water, deflated them, and donned them once again. They then planned their next move. Spock took another tricorder reading. Pointing to the right, he said, "Doctor, there will be a large underground room at the end of this passageway. Shall we proceed?"

Within minutes the two officers came to a huge, ornate door which blocked their further passage. The door was of Duralidium, one of the hardest substances known. It would . . . be impervious to any of their attempts to force it open. Yet there did not appear to be any means of entrance on this side: neither latch nor bolt, knob nor handle.

Partly with his tongue in his cheek, partly in all seriousness as a result of the unexpected events which had been happening on Elysia, McCoy asked, "Do you suppose if we simply visualize the door as open, it will indeed open? Do you think our magical skills have developed to that extent?"

Spock started to say that magic did not work so handily, as simple wish-fulfillment, but before he could say so the doors did, indeed, slide open. Spock exchanged a long, measuring look with McCoy. *Has it come to this, then?* he wondered. *Is the adventure safely over? The Captain and the others, are they safe?*

Spock and McCoy entered a large, echoing room. The room was barren, save for a series of platforms set up at seemingly random intervals. On each platform stood one of the missing crewmembers of the *Enterprise*. Each crewman was frozen into a static position, and each appeared to be living in a dream world of his own.

The *Enterprise* personnel were not simply lost to passive dreaming, however. Spock and McCoy were dumbfounded to realize that, by concentrating on particular individuals, they could actually enter the private worlds of their dreaming comrades.

Barrows stood on one of the first platforms they came to. Without deliberately trying to trespass on her inner life, McCoy and Spock suddenly found themselves viewing the actuality of her dreams. Indeed, the dream became very real. As McCoy had predicted, the Ensign was wandering through a medieval neverland replete with dragons, castles, and golden knights.

Caught by sympathetic vibrations from his own Celtic past, McCoy found himself changing from casual viewer to active participant. He was not the first to have been caught up in the delights of Barrows' dream world. Sulu, whose real body stood on the platform next to Tonia, shared her dream in almost perfect sequence... at least, one of the knights coming to rescue the fair princess was definitely a highly scrutable Oriental.

McCoy began to slip into a trance state. The dream became even more real to him than the rescue attempt they were on. Only Spock's intervention, in a guise in keeping with the magical nature of the dream-world in which they wandered, pulled him back out of the dream.

Safely in touch with reality again, Spock and McCoy looked around. Uhura, Siles, Chekov, Moreau, and Adrax were all here. McCoy made the rounds of the entire room and took a scanning reading of each crewman. All were in good health despite their immobility. In the center of the room, frozen as immobile as his crew, was the captain of the *USS Enterprise*, James T. Kirk.

Although it was a temptation, McCoy avoided entering any more of the dream-worlds on display here. The missing crewmen had been found. Now they had to be returned to the *Enterprise*. Neither Spock nor McCoy could afford the indulgence of dreaming.

Spock took out his communicator. "Spock to *Enterprise*, Spock to *Enterprise*." There was no response.

"What you could use is a good crystal ball." No sooner were McCoy's sardonic words out than there, floating on thin air in front of Spock, was just such a device.

Spock raised a brow, then passed his hands over the ball in the best manner of sorcerers since the earliest times. Again his call went out. "Spock to *Enterprise*. Spock to *Enterprise*."

Seemingly out of nothingness, out of thin air, came the voice of Chief Engineer Scott.

"Mr. Scott, can you get a good fix on us?" Spock queried.

At Scott's affirmative response, the Vulcan ordered, "Then start to beam us aboard, Mr. Scott."

Scott's reply was immediate. "Aye, sir, that I will do." No sooner were the words spoken than, one by one, the crew and Captain were beamed back aboard the ship.



McCoy looked around bemusedly. "Spock, do you think they'll be all right once we get them back to the *Enterprise*?"

"Such is my supposition."

"I hate to respond emotionally, but I distrust any escape this easy-- particularly after the harrowing path we took to get here."

"I would normally agree with you, doctor, but unless something untoward occurs, let us not ungraciously fail to accept these gifts we are being given."

At that moment the engineer's voice reached Spock. "Mr. Spock, everyone has been beamed aboard the *Enterprise* save for yourself and Dr. McCoy."

"Very well, Mr. Scott, beam us aboard," said the First Officer. He and McCoy assumed beam-up positions. The familiar energies played around and through their bodies once again. A high-pitched whine, a fleeting moment of disorientation, and they dissolved into a thousand sparkling particles... but not too soon for a sense of *deja vu* to overtake Spock as he saw, winking into sight to perch on top of the crystal ball, the little elf who had set this entire adventure in action.

* * * * *

Spock and McCoy beamed up to the main transporter room. Kyle and the Chief Engineer were there, directing events. The transporter room was a bustle of activity, as the still dream-drugged crew-members were escorted to Sickbay by members of McCoy's staff.

McCoy and Spock stripped off their life-support suits. Then McCoy followed his crew. Spock, meanwhile, headed to his laboratory to conduct further experiments in an attempt to decipher the mysteries of Elysia.

Several hours later, McCoy sought out Spock. The Captain and the other rescued crewmembers were all resting satisfactorily and showing no ill effects from their sojourn on Elysia. McCoy was weary but in need of answers.

"Have you arrived at any conclusions yet, Mr. Spock?"

"I have arrived at a tentative working theory, doctor. However, I hesitate to advance such a radical theory with my present lack of definite proof."

"You mean you've another hunch?"

"Not at all, doctor. I have arrived at a logical conclusion based on the facts that I have at my disposal. It's just that I need more independent verification before I make my theories public."

"Spock, I'm a doctor, not mind-reader. Would you mind sharing your thoughts with me?"

Spock, who was seated at the library console, steepled his fingers and subconsciously assumed a teaching stance. "Doctor, do you recall our surprise

assumed a teaching stance.

"Doctor, do you recall our surprise on hearing that intelligence had never developed on Elysia despite seemingly ideal conditions? I believe that intelligence, of a kind and degree never known before, has *indeed* developed there. I believe there is a diffuse, planet-wide presence capable of sensing, feeling, being. It is as though the entire planet were a sentient, feeling, aware being."

McCoy was momentarily speechless. Then, in the voice of a man driven to desperation, he said, "I thought Vulcans don't joke. This is a fine time to start pulling my leg."

An almost undetectable gleam flickered briefly in Spock's eyes. "Doctor, I fail to see why I would wish to expend time or effort pulling on your ambulatory limb. I am not joking. A diffuse, planet-wide system of intelligence is the *only* solution which adequately covers all of the anomalies with which we are faced."

McCoy, convinced of Spock's serious intention, listened carefully to the First Officer as he explained his theory.

"The planet had developed sentience and was capable of learning. But I believe it was unaware of itself, unaware of everything, until first contact was made with the Federation. At that point, the planetary intelligence became truly aware of self and of others. The planet sensed the thoughts, feelings, and desires of the survey crew, and while they were still far enough away to be unaware of what was happening. Elysia rebuilt herself into their image of a dream world. This would seem to be provable fact, doctor. The evidences of the massive terra-forming are still to be seen if one knows where to look. Also fact: there are no animal remains - skeletal or otherwise - older than 25 years ago, when the initial exploration team was here."

Spock paused, anticipating a response of some sort from McCoy. The doctor simply shook his head numbly and indicated that Spock should continue.

"With our coming, the planet has grown in awareness, and in curiosity. It wants to learn how other levels of intelligence function, and it is experimenting on transforming part of itself to another form, an intelligent, ambulatory form. I do not know if the elf will remain part of the diffuse world-mind, or if she will become an isolated personality, but it is fascinating to consider, is it not?"

McCoy croaked a response. "Yes, fascinating. My God, Spock! We could have been killed down there!"

Spock raised both brows in astonishment at McCoy's statement. "Doctor, despite all the harrowing events of the day, I received no sense of deliberate evil from any of the things that happened to us on the planet surface. Rather, I feel that the only thing Elysia wants is to know us, to learn from us."

McCoy looked at Spock wide-eyed, open-mouthed, completely in shock. "My God, Spock!" he repeated his initial stunned response to the First Officer's calm recital of these stunning facts. "If you are right, just think what it will mean! Elysia's powers may be immeasurable. This planet has the potential to be



even more dangerous than the "shore leave planet" or even the Guardian of Forever. Do we *dare* maintain contact with this planet?"

At that moment, as if in answer to Spock's statement, the voice of Transporter Chief Kyle sounded on the intercom. "Mr. Spock, please report to the main transporter room at once."

"What is the problem, Lt. Kyle?"

"Sir, you probably won't believe this, but a rather bedraggled dragon and a tiny elf just transported themselves aboard the Enterprise."

McCoy grinned. "You're right, Spock. Elysia does want to maintain contact with us. But just whom are we going to recognize as ambassador to the Federation? The elf, the dragon, or the whole blooming planet????"

TRIPTYCH

by

a.e. zeek

JAMES

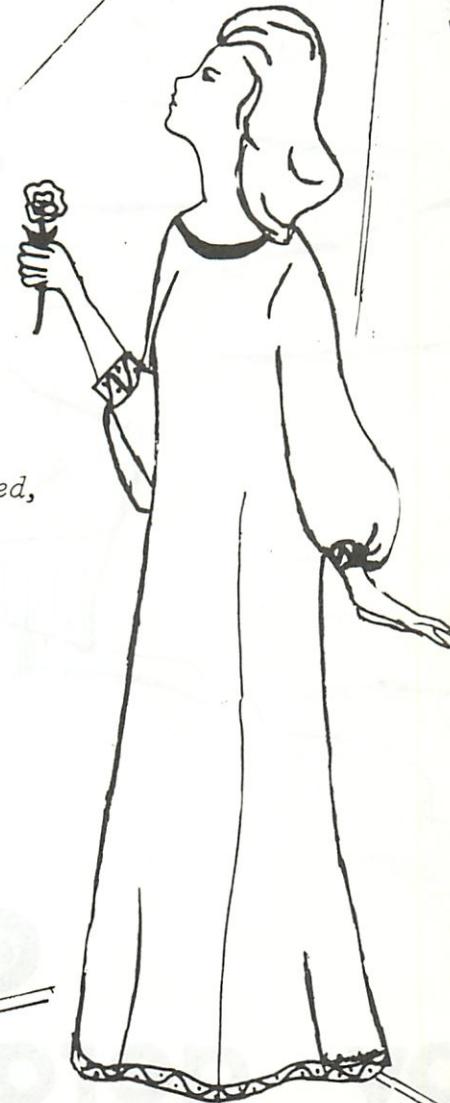
Corridors...
Reeking with remembrances
of roses
long ashes and memories...
Parade before the periphery
of eyes
caught in a vortex of movement
leading only - to empty rooms
where shadows dwell.

MIRANDA

Velvet ash the moon tonight,
dust the rose he sent.
Arms and loins of hunger carved,
my sign, the Unicorn.

KOLLOS

Where crystal flowers sweep
the pulsing sky,
and moons fall down
to dragons' dens
drowned deep in wined lagoons:
Where Kraken takes her toll
of sober men,
and true,
who give to her a tithe
that knows not drunkeness:
I dwell.





**FIRST
CONTACT
by gerald roberts**

The young Lieutenant held his phaser rifle at combat readiness, alert for any sound which might signal an advance by the enemy's scouts. He could hear every sound around him. Nothing was muffled in the crystal clear night air. He could taste the crisp apple-wine flavor of the approaching winter season. A faint alien fragrance was discernible, a fragrance that hinted of deep forests of pine and fir, pine and fir which had no ties to his own far distant forests. Over-head the Hunter's Moon hung golden, its large bulk obscuring part of the unfamiliar constellations spread across the sky. Nothing harmful seemed astir, yet that inner warning voice which had been honed by his combat training grew stronger to alert him to some unseen danger just beyond the pool of light cast by the sentry-torches.

He whirled suddenly, eyes probing the outer darkness. Surely that had been a snapping twig there, just there, where the darkness was a shade darker than the surrounding shadows. Shifting his rifle to one hand, the young officer reached for the tricorder slung on his shoulder and played it on the area. Nothing. He hesitated momentarily, then let the tricorder fall to his side. Thoughtfully, he pulled his communicator from his belt. Flipping open the grid, he thumbed the controls into readiness position.

"Major Li, Lt. Kirk here. Something was moving in that stand of trees just beyond our sensor range. But, it's awfully fast. Whatever it was, it was gone by the time I could get a tricorder reading."

The voice of his superior officer, subtly dehumanized by the electronic circuits of the communicator, came back to him. "Is it worth investigating?"

"I think so, sir," Kirk replied.

"Can you handle it alone, or do you want me to order out a full search force?"

Kirk looked again in the direction of the faint sound he had heard. All was still now. "I'd like to check it out a little more carefully before we roust the entire camp, sir."

The major considered the matter briefly, then said "Fine. Follow routine procedures and put the camp on readiness stand-by. Investigate carefully, Kirk, and contact Combat Control every hour." When Jim indicated his understanding of these orders, Major Li concluded, "Other than that, proceed as you see fit. Li out."

Kirk reset the communicator channel to the patrol frequency and sent a signal to Parker and Olafsson, the two officers who shared this midnight patrol with him. From equidistant points around the camp boundaries they called in.

He thumbed the sending control button. "Gentlemen, I think we're under observation but it's impossible to tell if it's by the enemy or not. I've contacted the Major, and I'll be going out to investigate. I'll alert the back-up crew, and put the camp on stand-by status as soon as I cut off from you. Be prepared to take up new positions. Cunningham will be taking over for me."

Parker and Olafsson acknowledged Kirk's message. Shifts in their sending frequencies showed that they were gradually moving into new positions in prepar-

ation for the augmentation of their ranks by the back-up crew.

Meanwhile, the Lieutenant was fitting actions to his words. He broke communication with his crew and again thumbed his communicator, this time sending on the frequency band of the second shift. "Cunningham, come in please. Lt. Cunningham, come in, please."

Lt. Meg Cunningham, in charge of the second shift on guard duty, responded almost before he was through signaling. "Cunningham here. What's the problem, Jim?"

Lt. Kirk quickly brought her up to date on the situation. A long, low whistle sounded over the communicator. "If the Kzinti are out there, Jim, reconnaissance will be tricky over that terrain at night. Are you sure you don't want a full detail assigned to you?"

"Not until I'm positive there's something out there, Meg. The less attention we call to ourselves at present, the better."

Kirk alluded to the fact that the planet on which they were based, Mandalar, had a native population: agrarian, pre-industrialization, and ursinoid. However, a fleeing Kzinti lifeboat had been known to land on Mandalar after a major space engagement during which the *USS Farragut* had succeeded in disabling and capturing the *MKD Farang*. Captain Garrovick of the *Farragut* had sent down to Mandalar's surface a hand-picked team under the command of Major Li Pao of the Planetary Expeditionary Forces, now on detached duty to Star Fleet. The Federation team now had a difficult dual task. They had to seek out and capture the last of the enemy raiders, while avoiding all contact with the natives of the planet.

Kirk was afraid the two tasks would be mutually incompatible, particularly since the Kzinti had never shown any hesitation in contacting, subverting, or enslaving native populations. He could only hope that the entire enemy faction would be captured before Mandalar's development was warped beyond recognition by contact with the Outside. To this end, rather than increase the risk of contamination, Kirk was prepared to set out on a solitary reconnoitering mission.

Now his fellow officer was indicating her understanding of his plea. "You may be right to be so careful at this stage of development, Jim. I'll contact Thirac and Abijar," she named the two officers who shared her tour of duty. "I'll take up your post and deploy my men at the far camp boundaries."

Kirk responded. "Right, Meg. I'll meet you at the sentry post and turn guard command over to you officially."

He ceased broadcasting and placed the communicator back in its accustomed place on his belt holster. While speaking with the Major and his fellow sentries, Kirk had been circling gradually about the perimeters of his sentry post. During this entire maneuver he had kept eyes and ears alert for any untoward incidents outside the safety of the boundary force-field. Nothing. However, remembering the stealth of the alerting noise he had heard, he found himself less than reassured by the present lack of overt hostility.

Now he had reached his immediate goal, the main sentry post of his guard

station. From this area he could, as Officer of the Day- a term adapted from Terran military usage- control all security measures of the camp. Lt. Cunningham was not there yet. While he waited for her, Kirk set in motion the automatic relay system that would put the camp on readiness stand-by. Setting down his rifle, he began pressing buttons on the intricate console board of the sentry command station.

Immediately, the lights of the camp dimmed, and sensorscopes increased the range of their probing. Row after row of defensive weapons silently, automatically, slid into position and armed themselves. A soft, thrumming alarm was sounded through the camp, alerting all its personnel to the possibility of enemy action.

Just as the last note of the alarm faded, Lt. Meg Cunningham arrived at the sentry command station. Even under circumstances such as this, Jim found it a pleasure to see her. Her golden skin reflected the amber sheen of the lights, and her glinted with deep copper highlights. Not even the utilitarian uniform she wore, straight trousers and a bulky landing jacket, could disguise her figure.

Forcing his attention back to duty, Kirk passed over to her the official OD sash insignia. As the Officer of the Day, she would now be able to challenge anyone, even ranking officers, seeking to enter or leave the camp. Jim loosened the velcro fastening of the OD identifying arm-band. Taking it off, he handed that over to Cunningham also. He then turned on the sentry log and officially recorded the transfer of responsibility from his hands to Meg's.

Cunningham acknowledged his actions. She received the sash and arm-band from him, put them on, and recorded her own statements into the sentry log. The safety of the entire camp now rested in her capable hands.

Kirk picked up his rifle and, turning resolutely away, began walking to the boundaries of the camp. Reaching the force-field barrier, he looked back at Lt. Cunningham and signaled her to lower the defense screen so he could leave the camp. "

"Jim," Cunningham's voice deepened momentarily, "be careful." She then operated the machinery which would, for a short time, lower the force-field barrier.

Lt. Kirk gave her a wry grin. "Meg, I intend to be *very* careful." Then he turned and left the safety of the camp. Behind him, a faint hum indicated that the force-field had been restored as soon as he had passed the perimeter of the camp.

The Hunter's Moon still filled the sky, and had now been joined by the smaller and more silvery Traveller's Moon. Here in the open, the two lumenous satellites provided enough light for Kirk to see his way, even though he had already passed beyond range of the lamps of camp. Only when he reached higher ground and the deeply forested area would he no longer be able to depend on Mandalar's satellites for illumination.

As he strode along, Kirk breathed deeply of the fall-scented air. Forests



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and hayfields, smoke and snow were contained in each inhalation. Jim had to constantly remind himself he was on an alien planet, and not on Earth. He could enjoy exploring this planet were it not for the seriousness of their current mission.

Idly, Jim wondered if the Federation planned to open Mandalar to limited contact, and if he could volunteer for the contact team. But no, regulations said contact personnel had to be racially compatible to the major sentient race of the contact planet so that chances of culture shock could be lessened and so that- hopefully- extra terrestrial origins could be masked.

Kirk grinned. With the help of dura-fur and a good make-up job he just might pass for a mangy, deformed, runtish cub on a planet where the only sentient species were fur-covered, bipedal ursinoids 2.37 meters tall with seven digits on each manipulative limb. But this was scarcely an image conducive to earning respect for the Federation from the natives of Mandalar. Initial contact, Jim realized, would have to be handled by the Ophicuans, that bearlike race only recently admitted to the UFP.

By this time, Jim had reached a large outcropping of rock. Pausing to reconnoiter, he looked back at camp. Initial setdown had been in the middle of a large, fairly level area serving as a boundary between an extensive forest and open grasslands beyond.

The original pilot ship, still in the middle of the setdown area, was now camp headquarters. Temporary shelters had been set up around the ship. These shelters functioned as mess hall, sleeping quarters, and laboratory facilities. Shuttle craft had been placed defensively around the camp, and the finest modern surveillance equipment was in active use to protect the camp, which, at the moment, reminded him of nothing so much as a faded picture in a history tape of

a pioneer settlement on his home planet, set down in hostile Indian territory.

With the *Farragut* light-years away, escorting the captured *Farang* to the nearest starbase, the camp detachment was, of necessity, a completely self-sustaining unit. It was unknown how many beings had escaped in the large life boat they had traced to this planet.

Major Li's force had been chosen, therefore, with great care. It had to be large enough and well-equipped enough to handle any number of unexpected situations which might come up, yet still be small enough to hopefully avoid detection by the primitive natives of the planet.

The members of this force were all officers in whom Captain Garrovick and Major Li had the utmost confidence. They ranged from seasoned veterans with dozens of hostile planetfalls to their credit, to eager junior officers on their first deep-space mission. Yet all possessed some elusive spark, some undefinable talent which marked them out as being above the common ken. The members of the expeditionary force possessed intelligence, initiative, and imagination. Thus, Major Li had not hesitated to accept Kirk's determination of the situation, or to endorse this present reconnaissance move.

From Kirk's present vantage point, all appeared normal at the Federation camp. The camp site had been chosen just as carefully as had been the members of the expedition. The chosen area was far away from any of the rural settlements of the ursinoids. To the north and east, the flat open area of the grasslands afforded an excellent view to far distant mountains, mauve and silver now in the light of the two moons. To the south, there ran a cold, clear, swift flowing stream with water deliciously comparable to all humanoids on the task force. On the other side of the stream, a sheer cliff stretched itself upward, striated pink, silver-orange, mauve and vermillion. A small exploratory party would be dropped by shuttlecraft on top of the cliff on the morrow. Its members would explore this area and set up a small outpost if it appeared warranted.

Behind Kirk were several scattered clumps of coniferous trees, out-riders of the looming forest which lay to the west of camp. The sound he had heard, the sound which had brought him out on this quest, had appeared to originate from this area. This forest outcropping, therefore, had been the Lieutenant's immediate objective. Kirk gave one last, long, careful look at the camp. He could see the sentries making their appointed rounds, the quickening life of a camp awakening to the sounds of his alarm. This was the only change since the start of his excursion. Content that there had been no increased danger since his departure, he turned and headed towards the outreaching forest.

All of his senses were operating at optimum. Although he had no tangible proof as yet, Kirk was convinced that the noise he had heard was more than a simple nocturnal forest sound. There had been too much an air of stealthy deliberation, of sentience. Kirk was certain, too, that in the depths of this forest would be found just the type of cover in which the enemy would quickly go to earth, safely hidden from seeking eyes. It was Kirk's hope that, having started out in pursuit almost immediately, he would at least get a general fix on his theoretical noise-maker.

The tall, needle-bearing trees with their fragrant conic seeds grew more

thickly here. Kirk checked the portable sentry probe he had brought with him, slung over his shoulder with his tricorder. The readings showed he was almost exactly at the spot from which the stealthy sound had come.

Without much hope, he took a tricorder reading of the area. Other than readings compatible with small woods creatures, nothing. There was no sign of sentient life. He swung the tricorder in a large arc. Still nothing unusual. Finally, he directed the instrument towards the deeper reaches of the forest. Hundreds of readings flooded the tricorder's readout panel. It was impossible to pick out any single reading as belonging to the noise-maker -- particularly when several readings that could be read as ursinoid, or fellinoid -- and could conceivably be intelligent -- now showed on the instrument panel.

It was obvious to Kirk that his reconnaissance would have to be done the painstaking way. He set his rifle down and reached into one of the inner pockets of his landing jacket. He took out a rectangular case. From this, he drew forth a pair of night-optic-lenses, frequently referred to as 'owl-eyes' by the less reverent junior officers of the *Farragut*. And, indeed, the specially treated lenses did impart a certain 'owliness' to the wearer. They were large, and blue tinted, and were set in a flexi-plas band which hugged the head closely. Philosophically resigning himself to never winning a beauty contest, the lieutenant donned the lenses and continued with his search of the area.

Even with the excellent night sight imparted by the 'owl eyes', the lieutenant had difficulty at first spying anything out of the ordinary. This might almost be a pristine, virginal wilderness. There was no sign of intelligent life. Even the grass-like ground-cover underfoot appeared smooth, untrampled. The few broken twigs lying around could not be taken for evidence; they could have as easily been broken off by a strong gust of wind. The tall trees which roofed the sky held their secrets well.

A stubborn inner sense insisted, however, that he continue looking for some small shred of evidence that a sentient being had kept watch on the camp from this very location. His stubbornness appeared to be in vain at first. No evidence was forthcoming.

Discouraged, almost unsure of his senses, he turned to go. He would take one more tricorder reading. If there were no definite sign of sentience, he would mark the location of the large ursinoid and fellinoid readings, and then return to camp.

Just then, a small night animal, alerted to instant response by the unusual spate of activity near its home, darted from the root of the tree by which Kirk was standing. The creature's paws churned up the ground in passing. A small pebble was turned up. It caught Jim's eye.

He leaned over to pick it up. Straightening, he examined it, curiously at first, then more closely. Excitement grew in him. He brushed off all the clinging dirt. Scarcely larger than the nail of his fourth finger, the pebble was an opal-like gem-stone. It was obviously not in its natural state. Faint though they were, the marks of cutting and grinding instruments could be discerned on the stone's surface.

"All right, James T.," he said to himself, "learn to take these things in stride. This stone could very easily be native to this world and could

haven been dropped here aeons ago." Kirk changed the setting on his tricorder from animal life to mineral readings. He then played the tricorder over the stone. Minute quantities of trigellium were in the gem-- and trigellium, a very rare element, had not been listed on the initial geological survey of the planet!

Keeping a tight rein on his excitement, he put the opalescent gem-stone into a small specimen pouch which, in turn, he tucked into a pocket in the lining of his landing jacket. Lt. Kirk then examined even more carefully than before the area around the spread of trees. No new evidence was found, however.

Kirk unhooked his communicator from his belt and flipped open the sending grid. He began to call on Cunningham's band. "Lt. Cunningham, come in, please." His relief officer answered immediately. "Cunningham here. What is it, Jim?"

"Meg, has geology sent in a follow-up report yet?"

"Hold on please, Jim." There was a pause while Cunningham ran the reports received during the day through the small portable computer attached to the sentry command station. "Yes, Jim, SenComp shows a follow-up report received. Do you need any specific information?"

"Were any traces of trigellium found in a natural state?"

"Trigellium? No, no traces at all," came the anticipated reply. "A specific test was made today for elements in the gellium family. The only findings were minute traces of bigellium and artellium."

Jim nodded to himself at this vindication of his theory. "Meg, tell the canny Major he chose his landing site well. I just found a small gem-stone, obviously toolled, bearing traces of trigellium. No sign of the original owner, though. Our little camp spy could teach the Amerindians a thing or two about woods-craft."

"A gem-stone? Jim, could your spy be female?" Cunningham questioned.

"I don't know, Meg. I suppose it's possible, although it's not really necessary. Intelligence reports would indicate that some upper caste male Kzinti warriors wear jeweled arm-guards, a carry-over, we assume, from the days when warfare was a bit more personal and strenuous, and the arm-guards served as armour protection during close in-fighting."

Kirk completed his call, alerting Lt. Cunningham that he planned to press more deeply into the forest. He reaffirmed that he would report back to her regularly on a half-hour basis. Both Kirk and Cunningham then broke their connection. Kirk returned his communicator to its position on his belt. He picked up his rifle and checked that he had all his equipment. Adjusting his glasses a shade more comfortably, he entered the cool, hidden recesses of the wooded section.

Jim was able to keep to a relatively straight path for the first several hundred meters. Then, as the undergrowth became more dense, he was forced to start following a more torturous path through

the coniferous forest. At appropriate intervals he paused to sweep the area with his tricorder, checking for large life-forms. Both the felineoid and the ursinoid readings he had received earlier remained constant.

Kirk continued to press onward. He was young, and in the peak of physical conditioning. He was finding this mission, despite its serious nature, a welcome break from the dull routine of shipboard life.

Jim picked up several pine-cone like objects. He put them in his pouch to take to Martinez, the Chief Botanist of the *Farragut*- and one of the most important members of the expeditionary force. In addition, the Lieutenant kept eyes and ears open, making notations in his personal log from time to time of things which might prove of interest or value to the other experts of the *Farragut* crew: the graceful black and silver night flyer that glided past him, the small green-furred arboreal creatures that looked at him wonderingly from frog-like eyes as he went past, the variety of plant life growing here in the cool, fragrant, eternal shadows of the towering trees. Despite this, he never lost sight of his main mission, and maintained a constant state of alertness.

The forest opened suddenly into a small glade. Jim checked his chronometer. Time to contact camp again. A large rock off to one side caught his eye, and he walked over to it. Using the rock as a bench, he sat down and took stock of the situation. He set the rifle down next to him. Before contacting camp he took another tricorder reading. There was still no change in the life-form readings he had read earlier. He pursed his lips and whistled soundlessly. Such a complete lack of change was beginning to seem rather odd to him.

A thoughtful frown on his face, he pulled his communicator from his belt and flipped open the sending grid. "Lt. Cunningham, come in please, this is Kirk," he gave the familiar call once more.

"All right, Kirk. Cunningham here. Anything new to report?"

Jim was pleased to note that, despite the now extensive intervening forest, reception was clear and precise. Unlike most "improvements" the last redesign of the communicator had been more than cosmetic, and had actually resulted in enhanced performance. Jim still remembered the first communicator he had been issued at the academy: a primitive affair working on line-of-sight principles which bounced patterns off of any object in the way. It had been useless in large cities and forested areas and inside caves.

"Nothing on our midnight visitor, Meg. But Life Sciences and Botany will have a hay-day with classification of some of the plants and animals I've seen here." He paused and looked around. With the thinning of trees to form this protected little glade, the sky had once more become visible. Two moons hung directly overhead, flooding the glade with silver and gold light.

He took off his night-lenses. "Meg, its absolutely perfect here. I honestly can't remember an alien world I've enjoyed as much as this. It must be very like Earth before the Industrial Revolution."

"Survey reports show the correspondence with pre-Industrial Earth to be 97.83%, the highest ever," Meg commented.

"Well," Jim responded, "that would certainly account for the welcoming feeling I get from this planet."

Not even the electronic circuits of the communicator could make Meg's laughter less than musical. It sounded now, and drew from Kirk an involuntary smile in return. "Jim, just make sure it's only the planet that welcomes you. If the natives should decide to welcome *any* of us in a 'friendly' hug of brotherhood..."

"I know, Meg, I know. It'd be more than my dignity that would be dented. My poor fragile body would be strained to the limit, too...not to mention the damage to our non-intervention directive."

Meg sobered instantly. "Has there been any sign of natives, Jim?"

"I've been getting some ursinoid readings on the tricorder, Meg, as well as some felinoid ones. Nothing to show if either is sentient, though." Kirk paused thoughtfully. "The readings have been so steady, I suppose they could be from a herd, a pride, or what have you, of animals settled for the night. But it's strange to find ursinoid and felinoid readings so close together in nature."

"Why not sentient beings 'settled for the night'?"

"The readings aren't right for that, Meg. The zeta level would be higher and there'd be some indication of subconscious mentation."

"Unless the Kzinti or the Mandalarans have some way of masking your tricorders readings. Jim," Meg reminded him, "this is an alien planet. Anything is possible here." She went on, "What do you plan to do now? Is it worthwhile to continue on at all, or will you return to camp?"

"As long as I've come this far, I might as well continue for a kilometer or so further on. Even if I don't get any new evidence of our spy, at least we'll have some additional knowledge about this forest."

"All right, Jim. You're the one who's in the field. I'll speak to you again in an hour."

Kirk acknowledged her message, then broke communication and returned the communicator to his belt. He sat deep in thought for several more minutes. Then, on impulse, he changed the tricorder setting to mineral once again. He played the tricorder in a large arc. Trigellium! Jim sprang to his feet. Holding the tricorder before him, he paced the boundaries of the peaceful seeming glade. Trigellium readings came from every point around the circle. That could only mean--he pulled the communicator from his belt once more, but a sudden noise behind him caught his attention before he could recontact Lt. Cunningham. He whirled to face the sound, mentally berating himself for having left the rifle back where he had been sitting.

A dark, slight form stood on the edge of the clearing, a form which held in its slender hands a thin, coldly gleaming piece of metal... It raised this now to point directly at Kirk. Before the lieutenant could gather more than an impression of the other and of its weaponry, the being fired on him.

A cold blue light flashed from the front of the weapon. The light reached Kirk, enveloping him completely. To Jim, it felt as though he had suddenly been wrapped in a blue-silver cloud. The cloud filled his eyes, his ears, his nose, his mouth. Sight was cut off, as was hearing. He could faintly make out a fragrance, an undertaste akin to thyme. He felt a faint chill, then all kinesthetic senses were deadened. Were it not for the musty taste still clinging to the back of his palate, he would now be cut off from all sensory input.

With the taste of thyme still lying on his tongue, James Kirk lost all sense of consciousness and fell unheedingly to the ground.

* * * * *

He awoke to pain. His head throbbed unmercifully and every nerve-ending had been rasped raw. The inside of his lids gritted with sand and his eyes burned from some corrosive substance. His lungs were congested, his mouth dry and parched and tasting of decomposed fish. A malodorous aroma, hinting of dead things rotting in stagnant ponds, hung about his nostrils. A harsh, grating, buzzing noise filled his ears. His heart was beating rapidly and his blood pressure was elevated. The least little movement hurt almost unbearably, as he found when he shook his head unwarily in an attempt to clear some of the cobwebs befogging his brain.

Kirk gave a hollow groan. Despite his pain and discomfort he managed to maintain his sense of humor. "Whatever it was, it'll never replace sleeping pills," he told himself. Then, though every bone, every joint, every muscle cried aloud at the abuse, he tried to shift to a more comfortable position. He couldn't move. Bewildered, he fought to bring himself back into contact with the world.

His eyes refocused slowly. He was trussed, hand and foot, and bound to a tree. He faced a large glade, the same or similar to the one he had been in when attacked by an unknown being. He must have been unconscious many hours, because it was no longer night. Mandalar's gaudy, lemon-colored sun shone overhead. Realizing how many hours had passed since his capture, Jim concluded that he had been moved while he was unconscious. Meg would have had a search party out to his last known location at his first failure to call in. However, no-one was about. Kirk halloed loudly, but there was no response.

He began to feel rather put upon. It was scarcely complimentary to be captured and then forgotten like this. He wondered if he had been left to starve, or perhaps to prevent one of the forest denizens from starving. Neither fate appealed to him.

His hands had been pulled behind him and wrapped around the tree trunk. Because of pain, he was forced to shift his body very slowly and very carefully. Nevertheless, he was able to work his hands down the trunk until they touched the ground. This gave his bonds more play, and enabled him to feel blindly behind him for something with which to sever those bonds. His patient search, conducted entirely by touch, was unrewarded. What stones and pebbles he could find were smooth, worn down by exposure to the elements.

Kirk refused to give up. Somehow, he would have to free himself. Laboriously, he began to inch his way around the tree, trailing dirt, stones, and pebbles from his fingers as he did so. Recurring bouts of dizziness caused him to stop periodically for a rest. By the third such pause he was facing the forest. He shifted his head from side to side. What movement there was in the forest's dark recesses appeared due to the routine and random activities of forest creatures. He listened attentively, but could discern no sign of purposeful movement.

The pain was at last beginning to subside, and the various side effects of the weapon wielded by his unknown assailant were also fading. He could smell the pleasant, piney, damp-earth aroma of the forest once again, and his ears were no longer ringing incessantly. He was still thirsty, but at least his mouth no longer tasted of decay and corruption.

With the pain level dropping swiftly, other, minor irritants began to assume disproportionate importance. Jim was drenched in sweat from his exertions and one persistently annoying drop had formed a rivulet down his spine. As feeling and sensitivity returned, he could feel the rough bark of the tree digging into his back, the exposed roots and rock-littered ground under him bruising his skin.

Gritting his teeth, Jim once again began his painful search for a means with which to cut himself free. His slow, agonizing progress continued for perhaps three-quarters of the way remaining, still without success. Again he was forced to rest, to gulp air into his deeply labored lungs.

He sat there several minutes, trying to determine his next step should he be unsuccessful in severing his bonds. The future, he had to admit, looked bleak. Nevertheless, he determined to continue actively searching for a release from his bonds. Taking a deep breath, he prepared to continue his slow, painful circumnavigation of the trunk of the tree.

At that moment, he chanced to glance to his immediate left. A pair of leatherlike half-boots stood in his immediate line of vision. Kirk offered up a silent prayer that the owner of the boots had not seen his as-yet-unsuccessful attempt to find a sharp implement with which to cut his bonds.

Raising his eyes from the boots, Jim looked up at the owner thereto. The being facing him held a slender silver instrument- probably the weapon with which he had been rendered unconscious- in the crook of its left arm. Its right hand, taloned with vicious-seeming claws, played with the handle of a short-bladed, business-like dagger. Jeweled arm-guards adorned both wrists.

His captor, whom he was now seeing clearly for the first time, was obviously a felinoid. On each side of the being's head tufted ears stood alert, twitching at every slight sound; Kirk found that he was being steadily regarded by a calm, unwavering stare from hooded, slit amber eyes which held in their bottomless depths unfathomable mystery.

Most solidos Kirk had seen of Kzinti warriors showed them as rough-furred, tigerish beings who were massively muscled and formidably fanged. The being now confronting him was puma-lithe, slender, and silken-furred. It was also, most obviously, a mammalian female, a female of unearthly beauty. This puzzled

Jim, since he knew from intelligence reports that Kzinti females were mentally inferior to the male, and, indeed, were unevolved, almost animal-like. He could only assume that the being facing him was a mutant, a sport. This would also account for the subtle physical differences he now perceived.

For several long moments Kirk and his captor silently confronted one another. Then, with a grace he found almost unbearably beautiful, she whirled and was gone. Jim thought of the fiery gem-stone which had led him thus far on this chase. In his mind there appeared a clear image of the gem-encrusted arm-guards the lovely feline warrior had worn on each wrist. "Meg," he silently congratulated his fellow officer, "I'll never mock woman's intuition again. It was a female Kzin."

Wondering if he dared move any further around the tree, Kirk carefully turned his head as far to the left as it would go. In spite of the fact that he had heard nothing, had received no inner warning of her presence his captor had returned and once again was regarding him from sombre eyes.



Jim shook his head ruefully. "Gentle femme," he said conversationally, "you will have to teach me how to move so silently. I can see where it will be necessary should our peoples continue to have dealings with one another."

His captor made no immediate response to his words, but continued to stare at him from golden, bottomless eyes. The sun on her black fur brought out deep blue highlights. She was clad in halter and shorts, an eminently practical outfit for forest surveillance. Jeweled knife and belt, encrusted arm-guards, gleamed in the sun. Other than the silver weapon she still carried, she bore no other encumbrance.

Although Jim had heard nothing, the female's ears suddenly flicked forward. She whirled so quickly that her fine silken hair belled out behind her. She drew her weapon up to firing position in a single fluid gesture. From the forest just beyond, as quietly as had arrived his captor, came another furred female warrior.

The Lieutenant gave a soundless whistle. The female of this species, at least this strange mutant breed, might be no deadlier than the male, but they were certainly far more aesthetically pleasing. With their small bone structure and graceful bearing they might almost be another race, another species even.

This second female was as lovely as the first. Body fur and long silken mane were pure white, eyes were deep green. She, also, was clad in halter and shorts, and wore leather half-boots on her feet. Jeweled arm-bands encircled each slender wrist. A gem-encrusted short-sword hung from a decorative belt girding her slim waist; otherwise, she was weaponless.

The black-furred feline propped her silver weapon up against a tree. She then advanced to the center of the clearing. The white-furred female duplicated her actions. Both cat-beings halted in the center of the glade. They were now almost face-to-face. Jim's captor uttered a single word, "M'rell." The newcomer responded, "Liress."

Jim cursed the fate that had him here, tied to a tree, with no access to the universal translator recently developed by Research and Development. As it was, he had no way of knowing if the two beings in front of him were greeting each other, identifying themselves, or issuing blood-duel challenges to one another.

In a practised, almost ritualistic gesture, keeping their left hands raised, each of the felinoids placed her right hand on the nape of the neck of the other. They then brought their heads close to one another, first on one side, then on the other. The Terran, watching closely, was irresistably reminded of two strange Earth-cats declaring a momentary truce with one another while matters of pressing importance needed their attention.

Jim wondered uneasily if he were the pending matter now before the two felinoids. Both felines dropped their hands, stepped back a pace, and began to converse in low, muted tones. An occasional glance in his direction left him in no doubt of the topic of conversation - James T. Kirk!

In the months since the Kzinti raiders had first made their presence known, several of their messages had been intercepted. With the help of the universal translator, a rudimentary Kzinti lexicon had been developed. Jim had absorbed this knowledge through hypno-learning. He wondered now if it had been a successful "take" or not. He was unable to understand any of the conversation of the two female warriors whose personalities had come to fill the glade to overflowing.

Jim cleared his throat noisily. Immediately, two pair of slit eyes



were steadily regarding him. Hesitantly, Kirk essayed an attempt at communication. "MLarada, Kzinti." That, if the intercepted messages had been interpreted correctly, should be a general greeting on the order of "Hail, warriors."

Green and amber eyes exchanged a long, measured look, then turned back to their contemplation of the Federation prisoner. Kirk took advantage of the attention they were paying him. Laboriously, he pieced together a message in High Kzin. "Lavar marmal. Kzinti memor. Prdil m'ralredar llral."

He wondered if the aliens heard the message he intended: "We are many. The warriors of Kzin are few. To insist on the satisfaction of pride would be a foolish thing." Jim could not be sure the felinoids heard or understood his message in its entirety. Had they been human, the looks they exchanged would have denoted complete bewilderment.

The two felines addressed one another again, but continued to glance repeatedly in Jim's direction. From the continued repetitions of the words "M'rell" and "Liress", and the context in which they were repeated, Jim deduced Liress was the black-furred feline, his captor, and M'rell was the white-furred one.

"M'rell. Liress." Kirk tried to get the correct intonation of each word. It was difficult, particularly since his vocal cords were not constructed to resonate to the purring undertones which formed such an integral part of the felinoid language. He was at least partially successful, for both alien warriors broke off their conversation and turned to look at him.

Liress, if that were indeed the name of the ebon-furred feline, approached him warily. Once again she placed her right hand on the hilt of her short-sword. Dagger-sharp claws tapped against the crystal facets of the bejeweled hilt surface. She threw a starement over her shoulder to M'rell, who responded with a short-clipped, almost snarled comment.

Squatting, Liress held her left hand out to Kirk. The lieutenant looked perplexedly at the taloned hand now only inches away from his face. Although Liress's claws were sheathed, Jim could see that when extended they would form formidably sharp, lethal cutting tools. He sensed that there was a purpose behind her gesture and that his correct interpretation of that hidden purpose might mark a change in his relationship with these alien beings.

Hesitantly, he looked from Liress to M'rell. Both felinoids were observing him closely. He closed his eyes in an attempt to recall the greeting they had given one another. Then he tried to correlate this with the observed behavior of the felines of Terra. Dangerous though it was to extropolate alien behavior from Terran analogues, he had no other choice at present since knowledge of the felinoids' species was very limited.

Into his mind there came a picture of Maisy D., his mother's favorite mouser, sniffing curiously at an orphan kitten brought home one rainy night by his brother, Sam. He remembered how close to one another M'rell and Liress had placed their heads. Perhaps the sense of smell played a much greater part in the rituals of these feline-beings than in those of his own anthropoid peoples?

Another growling comment from M'rell hastened his decision. He doubted if he could be in a worse position than he was in already. Kirk very loudly, very

very ostensibly, gave a sniffed greeting. All the while, he tried to keep a steady, reassuring hum throbbing in his throat. A faint fragrance akin to talcum or baby powder was exuded from Liress's skin. Jim twitched his nose and sniffed again. He tried to interject an interrogative tone into his sub-vocal humming.

Jim realized that, to someone not familiar with first contact procedures, his actions would appear ludicrous in the extreme. But xenopsychchology had been one of his favorite subjects at Starfleet Academy - and, indeed, the area of first contact had been his second field of specialization, as command had been his first. Kirk therefore realized that no sound, no gesture, no movement that enhanced communication, that strengthened contact, was ludicrous. The final test was in the degree of mutual understanding and rapport established.

Jim heard M'rell's harsh snarl cut off abruptly. What seemed to him a questioning note appeared in her voice. Opening his eyes, he saw that the white-furred feline had come over to Liress and was standing by her shoulder. M'rell and Liress exchanged a long, silent look. Kirk wondered briefly if much of their communication was on a non-verbal level, or if they were capable of ultra-sonic sounds. Either eventuality would make it difficult to establish total communication with these feline-beings.

Hesitantly, almost shyly, M'rell caressed Jim's cheek with a gentle, patting motion. Jim could feel the silken-soft texture of her fur, could sense the tightly wound strength in her slender body. She said something softly to Liress, and it was noticeable that the harshness had disappeared completely from her voice. Liress rose. The two felinoids began to pace the clearing, agitatedly discussing something all the while.

They stopped only when, in his heavily accented High Kzin, Jim once again began to laboriously compose a statement. "Miarada, Kzinti. Prdlo kredvar?" That, if his memory served him correctly, should mean, "Hail, warriors. Must we be enemies?"

M'rell and Liress again spoke seriously, concernedly to one another at his pause for thought. They seemed to reach some conclusion almost simultaneously, for they gently touched each other's face, then turned as one and walked back to Kirk.

Liress knelt down and began to untie the bonds on Kirk's feet. M'rell, standing facing him, began to speak in highly accented High Kzin. "Kzinti nelo-var. Lovar Caitian. Kzinti kredvar."

Jim grew tense with excitement. If he had understood M'rell correctly!! He formed a question, growing impatient with himself at his inability to think more quickly in the heavily intonated Kzin language. In response to his question, M'rell repeated her words and Liress echoed them. Both felines laid stress on the word *Caitian*. Jim cursed the loss of his translator. If he could only be sure of the correct wording and meaning of the High Kzin both he and the two females were using!

Before they could reach total understanding, a sudden mewling cry, followed by a thunderous roaring, came from the depths of the forest beyond. M'rell gave a high-pitched snarl of fury, whirled quickly, and raced back into the forest.

Llress, who had finished untying Kirk's feet, jumped to her own feet. She looked down at the Terran, hesitated a moment, then ran quickly after M'rell.

Jim struggled against the bonds still imprisoning his hands. "M'rell! Llress! What is it? Come back!" he shouted after them. They did not respond, did not turn back.

A throbbing, trumpeting cry echoed once again, punctuated by the spitting, snarling yowls of angered cats. There was a heavy crashing as of bodies being thrown about in a wild fury. To Jim's straining ears it sounded as though the entire forest were being uprooted in a pitched, heated battle.

The sound of battle grew fiercer and even more clamorous. It drew closer to the glade where Jim still sat imprisoned. Suddenly, with the fury of an exploding sun, three tangled bodies erupted into the open area in front of him.

M'rell and Llress were battling a huge, eight-foot-tall, ape-like beast with mottled brown fur. Both felines were fighting furiously, but to Kirk it appeared to be a losing battle.

M'rell had leaped up on the ape-beast's back. Her legs were wrapped around its chest. One arm was tightened around the huge creature's throat and her taloned fingers were twined into his thick coat of fur. In the other hand she held her dagger, and was trying to sever the beast's jugular vein with it. So thick and matted was its fur, however, she was finding the task impossible.

Llress, meanwhile, had also drawn her dagger. The black-furred feline was boldly attacking the ape-beast from the front, trying to find an exposed, vulnerable vital organ into which to plunge her short-sword. Despite her speed and agility, she could not reach the ape-beast. The constant windmilling motion of the beast's great arms drove her off each time she approached.

Neither M'rell nor Llress was able to break away from the unequal battle long enough to recover the silver weapon which still lay propped against the tree where Llress had left it. Jim threw a desperate, longing look at the strange weapon. If only Llress had had time to undo the bonds on his hands! He strained again and yet again against the imprisoning bonds which kept him tied helplessly to a tree while the two feline warriors sought to battle off a marauding creature larger than the two of them together.

One of the infuriated beast's air-deadening blows struck Llress. The redoubtable female warrior's slender form was thrown clear across the glade and landed with a heart-stopping thud. Her head struck a rock with a clearly heard crack.

Jim winced at the sound, and redoubled his efforts to free himself. The bonds which held him, weakened and frayed by the constant friction he had applied to them when he circled the tree, finally separated. Kirk quickly sprang to his feet and ran to pick up the slender, silver weapon.

He looked the weapon over hurriedly. So far as he could judge, it would fire if he pulled any one of several levers. Jim threw a worried glance over his shoulder to the ape-beast. The creature had managed to drag M'rell from his back and was shaking the slight feline back and forth furiously. Then it dashed her

The ape-beast was off and away before Kirk could get his feet under him and fall to the ground.

The ape-beast lumbered over to one of the trees and pulled off a branch as thick as one of Kirk's thighs. Turning, it headed back to the unconscious body of M'rell. It raised the unwieldy branch over its head, club like, as though to strike the feline's recumbent form.

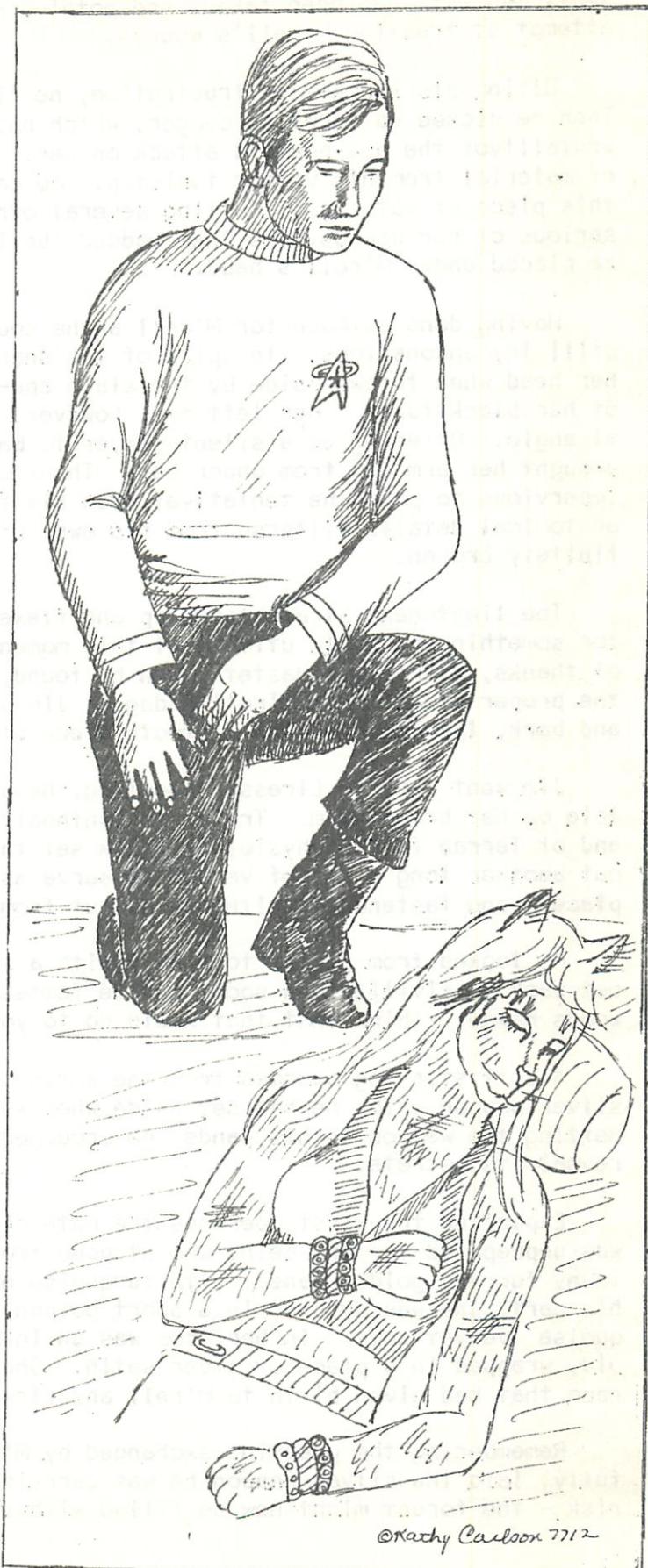
Kirk whirled to face the ape-beast at its first move away from M'rell. He pointed the weapon at the beast and pulled a lever. Nothing happened. He pulled a second lever. Again there was no apparent response. In desperation, he pulled the last movable lever just as the beast began to attack M'rell with the club.

This time a blinding beam of golden light flashed from the end of the weapon. The ape-beast was enveloped in a sparkling nimbus. The halo of light flashed from gold, to yellow, to a deadly, corporal hue. The halo then contracted, seeming to seep into the creature's body, and the beast dropped to the ground with a dull thud.

Kirk approached the ape-beast slowly, and cautiously prodded its body with the butt-end of his weapon. It was quite, quite dead. Jim looked around for the two feline warriors. Neither was moving. He set his weapon aside and went over to M'rell.

The white-furred alien lay there limply, breathing very shallowly. The snowy purity of her coat was now besmirched by large stains of orange blood oozing from a deep cut on her temple and from several other serious body wounds.

Kirk searched through all the pockets of his landing jacket.



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They had been thoroughly cleaned out during the time he was unconscious. His small medi-kit had been taken, and nothing remained with which he could make an attempt at treating M'rell's wounds.

Biting his knuckle in frustration, he finally took off his landing jacket. Then he picked up M'rell's dagger, which had been shaken from her grasp by the brutality of the ape-beast's attack on her. With the dagger, he cut a swatch of material from his velour tunictop. He carefully wiped the blood away with this piece of material. Cutting several other swatches, he bandaged the most serious of her wounds. He then wadded the landing jacket into a ball, which he placed under M'rell's head.

Having done as much for M'rell as he could, Jim went over to where Liress still lay unconscious. In spite of the sharp impact with which she had struck her head when thrown aside by the slain ape-creature, no blood dulled the gleam of her black fur. Her left arm, however, was bent beneath her at an unnatural angle. Offering up a silent prayer to Bastet for guidance, Kirk slowly brought her arm out from under her. Thankful that she was still unaware, still impervious to pain, he tentatively ran his fingers up and down her arm. The anatomical details differed from his own, of course, but Liress's arm was definitely broken.

The Lieutenant straightened up and flexed taut muscles. He looked around for something he could utilize at this moment. He sent another prayer, this one of thanks, winging to Bastet when he found, almost immediately, a tree branch the proper size. With M'rell's dagger Jim was able to pare off excess leaves and bark, leaving him with a smooth piece of wood suitable for a splint.

Jim went back to Liress. Kneeling, he placed his hands as gently as possible on her broken arm. Trying to synthesize his knowledge of human anatomy and of Terran feline physiology, Kirk set the arm as well as he could. He then cut another long strip of velour to serve as padding, put the denuded branch in place, and fastened it with strips cut from his trousers.

He looked from Liress to M'rell with a wry smile on his face. "If we don't get back to civilization soon, gentle femmes, I'll soon be running around the woods naked. Think what that would do to your reputations!"

A soft stirring sounded from the woods behind him. Kirk raced over to the silver weapon which he had set aside when working on the wounded felines. Hefting the weapon in his hands, he crouched low and waited for the forest to reveal its secrets.

Expecting the worst, perhaps the mate of the ape-beast he had slain, he was unprepared for the being who stepped from the sanctuary of the tall trees. Tawny furred, golden maned, with turquoise eyes alert for any sudden move on his part, she was dressed in a short golden skirt, a golden halter, and a turquoise velvet cape. In her arms was an infant scarcely more than three days old, wrapped in a piece of amber satin. She was, quite obviously, of the same race that had given birth to M'rell and Liress.

Remembering the greeting exchanged by M'rell and Liress, Jim slowly, carefully, laid the silver weapon he was carrying on the ground. He was taking a risk - the forest might now be filled with feline sharp-shooters waiting for

him to disarm himself - but felt that the situation more than warranted such a move of trust on his part.

Holding his left hand up, as he had seen M'rell and Liress do when they first greeted one another, he slowly advanced to the slender, tawny feline. Bearing in mind the words that M'rell had tried to make clear to him, he greeted the lovely new-comer in his halting High Kzin. "Hail, noble lady of Cait. I am Lt. James T. Kirk of the Federation."

The felinoid purred a response to his words. Holding up her own hand, she said slowly, in the highly accented High Kzin he had come to expect, "Hail, Jaméssakirrak. Cait greets you. I am Dr'anya."

She placed her head next to Kirk and gave what he now recognized to be a ceremonial sniff of greeting. He was sure that, with olfactory senses at least ten times greater than his own, his scent, his basic smell, had now been categorized and memorized so that Dr'anya would never forget him. As best he could with his limited sense of smell, James repeated her sniffing action, a move which seemed to please her very much.

Just then a groan sounded from where Liress lay. Jim and Dr'anya, startled out of their attempts at communication, both looked over towards the black-furred feline. Liress had gained consciousness and was trying to struggle to her feet, but the improvised splint on her arm was making it difficult.

Kirk went to her side and, exercising extreme caution with her injured arm, helped her up. Gravely, Liress inclined her head and said, "I thank you, warrior." She then caught a glimpse of Dr'anya for the first time, and her eyes dilated with surprise.

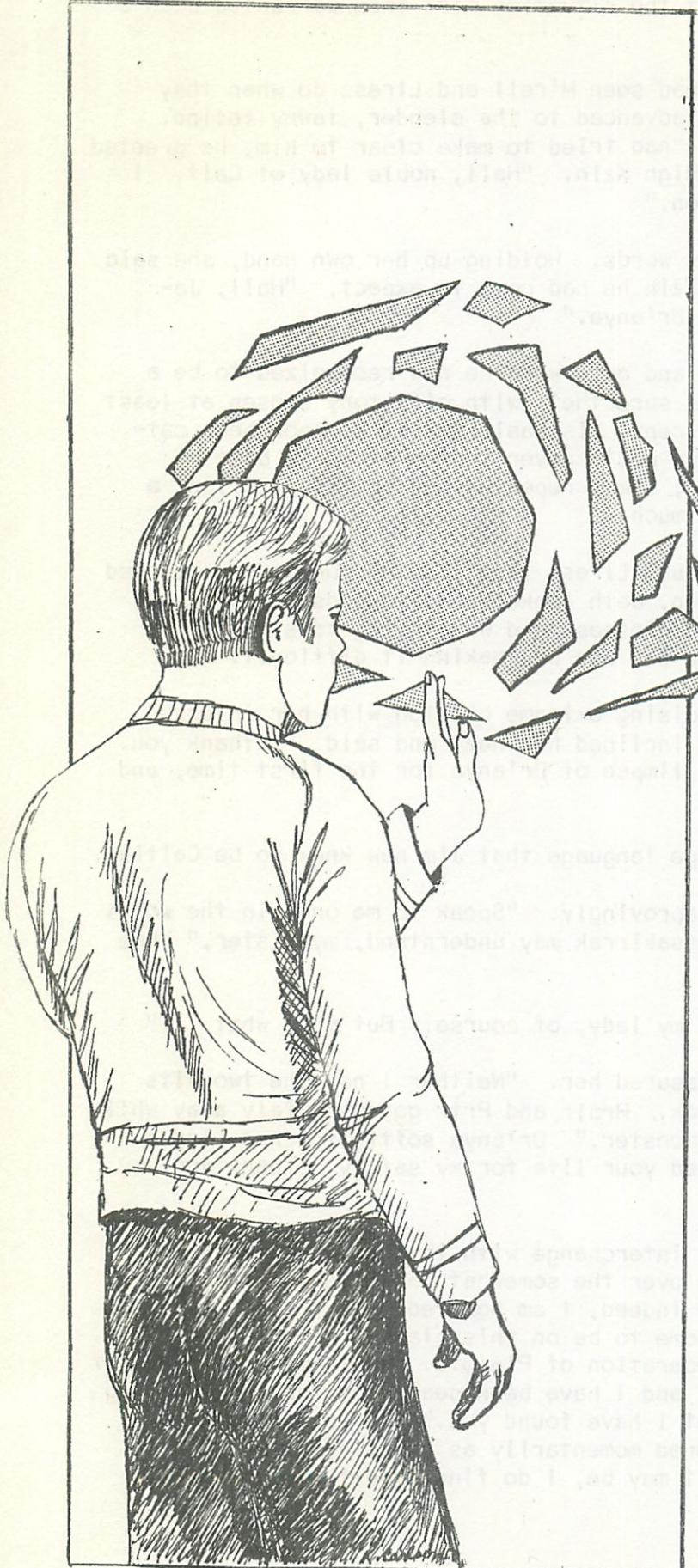
She greeted Dr'anya in the strange language that Jim now knew to be Caitian.

Dr'anya looked at her somewhat reprovingly. "Speak to me only in the words of the eaters-of-flesh, so that Jaméssakirrak may understand, my sister," she admonished Liress.

In confusion, Liress said, "yes, my lady, of course. But you, what...?"

"All is well, Liress," Dr'anya assured her. "Neither I nor the two kits were injured in the ape-beast's attack. Hralr and Prtr got us safely away while you and M'rell bravely attacked the monster." Dr'anya softly touched Liress's face. "Again you have all but offered your life for my safety. Thank you, my sister-warrior."

Jim, who had been following this interchange with interest, interrupted at this point. "My lady," he struggled over the somewhat harsh-sounding syllables of the High Kzin words, "I am glad - indeed, I am honored - to have been of some assistance to you. But how do you come to be on this planet? I am a part of a peace-keeping force of the United Federation of Planets. We tracked a life-boat from a Kzinti raider to this planet, and I have been searching for the escaping marauders. I have found no Kzin, but I have found you." Liress snorted derisively at this. Jim's face lightened momentarily as he said, "I stand corrected. You found me. Be that as it may be, I do find myself wondering just who you are, my women of mystery."



Completely serious again, Jim continued his questioning of Dr'anya and Liress. "You are Caitians, a people with whom we of the Federation have had no dealings? You are not friend to the Kzin, but, rather, foe?"

Turquoise eyes met hazel in a silent, measuring gaze, flicked to gold for support and affirmation, then returned to hold hazel. The tawny furred feline leader raised her right hand and held it extended towards Jim, fingers spread, thumb crossed against palm.

After an initial hesitation, and some judicious prompting by Liress, Jim repeated Dr'anya's gesture.

Tail flicking approval of his participation in this ritual, Dr'anya spoke the ancient words as written by the Old Ones.

"Jaméssakirrak, you are a stranger to our fires, alien to our blood, and out-worlder to our home of Cait. Yet you have risked your own life for one of ours. Know, then, stranger-who-has-been, that you are of our hearth, of our blood, and of our world, brother-warrior-who-is. Know, then, your history as it relates to deeds of the present."

As Dr'anya spoke, James was able to piece together much of what had happened. As he had surmised, the three felines were members of a race with whom the Federation had not yet come in contact. Calling themselves the Caitians, their race shared a common genetic heritage with the Kzinti. Yet, over the millenia, racial, cultural, and social differences had developed.

Smaller, slighter, and more graceful than the Kzinti, with subtle anatomical and physiological differences, the Caitians were also

more philosophical, more artistic, less militaristic, and less imperialistic than the Kzinti. Moreover, among the Caitians male and female were both fully developed evolutionarily - and were co-eval culturally.

Cait was a much richer system than Kzin, and the Kzinti frequently raided the ships of their distant cousins. It had been in one such raid that Dr'anya, a member of the Caitian High Council, had been captured along with her entire household, and with several other high ranking government officials.

The Kzinti were planning to hold the Caitians for ransom. They were particularly well-pleased that Dr'anya was pregnant and about to give birth. This raised her monetary value enormously, and placed her in danger of enslavement, rather than ransom.

But before the Kzinti plans could come to fruition, the *USS Farragut* had struck. In the confusion the Caitians had managed to arm themselves and escape in a life-boat. In unfamiliar space, pursued by a task force from the *Farragut*, unsure of who were enemies or who were friends, the Caitians - not realizing that Mandalar was inhabited - sought refuge on the planet.

The stirring adventure that Dr'anya related to Jim continued to have tragic overtones. The life-boat had crashed on landing. More than one-half of the Caitian refugees, including Dr'anya's life-mate, had died in the crash. Only Dr'anya, M'relli, Liress, and six others had escaped unscathed.



"We saw your pilot-ship land, Jamessakirrak," Dr'anya concluded, "and we watched very, very carefully for any sign of hostility on your part. We saw you leave your camp.. Not knowing what your purpose was, we kept you always under watch. We kept most carefully out of sight, and trusted to the diffusion power of our guard-stones to interfere with any tracking equipment you might have with you." Dr'anya smiled. "You are persistent, my brother. We had to move our camp when it appeared that you might head directly towards it."

Liress, who had let Dr'anya recount to Jim the history of their present misfortunes, interrupted at this point. "It was only when, by sheer accident, you seemed to become aware of our presence that I stunned you."

Jim grimaced. "About that weapon of yours..." As he described the symptoms he had had on awakening, the two felines listened in amazement.

"But, Jamessakirrak," Liress protested, "the *drijana* has no after-effects at all! It simply sends one into a calm, peaceful sleep. And the death it brings on the kill setting is the kindest death we know... like entering a dream-state."

Jim looked at the black-furred feline. "Liress, you forget that my physiology is quite different than yours. I assure you. The effects of the *drijana* on me were far from dream-like. Nightmarish would be more precise. But I am curious. Why did you finally begin to untie me?"

"The Kzinti had warned us not to expect aid from your ship. They said that the beings attacking the *Farang* were simianoid monsters who hated all beings not ape-like. They said your killed or enslaved all races you came in contact with, and we'd be even more ill-treated by your people than by theirs."

"But you did not conform to this pattern, my brother-warrior. You tried to greet us in Kzin, and, even bound, you offered peace. You tried to greet us in our own manner, even though your sense of smell appears to be much inferior to ours. These mediatory attempts were not the actions of the monster the Kzinti had led us to expect. We decided to trust you, and I started to untie you. But at that moment Dr'anya and the kits were attacked and needed us." Liress's eyes darkened momentarily as she looked to where M'rell still lay. "M'rell... M'rell does not awaken. Our numbers grow steadily fewer."

Jim strode across the small clearing and knelt at the side of M'rell's still figure. Worriedly, he checked breathing, respiration, and other vital signs to the best of his ability. He looked over to Dr'anya. "My lady, I do not know the signs of illness in your people, but to me, M'rell appears to have a raging fever. Are any of your people skilled in medicine?"

Dr'anya and Liress exchanged worried looks. Dr'anya turned back to Kirk. "No, Jamessakirrak, they are not," she said grimly. "He who was our healer for both mind and body died at the hands of the Kzinti."

Jim looked back at M'rell. To his untutored eyes it looked as though delirium might be starting. She was beginning to moan fitfully, to toss and turn, to cry out in Caitlan. "Then, my lady, may I recommend that you call your people together so that we can head back to the Federation camp? We have a doctor there who may be able to help M'rell."

Dr'anya searched his face as though unsure of the Kzinti words he used. "My brother, when I saw you tending to the wounds of M'rell and Liress, even though but a short while earlier they had held you prisoner, I knew that you were trustworthy. Battling the ape-beast was a thing that you could have done for your own good only. After all, if the creature killed M'rell and Liress, what was to keep it from attacking you? But to aid the injured, the injured who had been only enemy to you - this was different. I felt that I had nothing to fear from you, and I revealed myself."

The golden feline paused, then bent out her hand. "Have I not just said that, despite our differences, we are kin? My words would be as nought if, at this first test I did not trust my kins-man. Come, my brother, let us seek your camp."

Kirk gathered M'rell's body into his arms, then straightened. Dr'anya pulled a communications devise - apparently without translator, Jim noticed - from her belt and spoke into it softly. In response to her words, six other Caitians - two women, one carrying another infant dressed identically to the child in Dr'anya's arms, and four males - slipped silently from the forest to the small glade. Dr'anya spoke to them briefly in their own language. Kirk momentarily became the cynosure of all eyes as the newcomers silently weighed Dr'anya's words, and himself, in the balance.

The six conferred, then a spokesman, one of the male aristocrat-warriors, turned to Dr'anya. Agreement must have been reached, because Dr'anya faced the Terran proudly. Raising her right hand again in a now familiar gesture, the tawny felinoid said, "Shall we go, Jamessakirrak? Shakk alar?"

The small party set off in the direction of the Federation camp.

* * * * *

Seven planet months later, when the *Farragut* was ordered to Cait as part of a diplomatic mission, a special ceremony was held. A grateful Caitian government awarded the Karagite Order of Heroism to Lt. James T Kirk of Starfleet. The auspiciousness of the occasion was heightened by the fact that this was the first time in history an outworlder had received this high honor.

The award ceremony was attended by many prominent beings from any number of Federation and allied planets. Starfleet chose to mark the occasion by presenting Kirk with a special commendation for his successfully completed "first contact with the Caitians. Already there was talk of Cait entering the Federation as full standing members,

And in the audience a young Caitian sat with her parents, both of whom had been with Dr'anya's party on Mandalar. Her imagination caught fire from the stories of adventure and bravery being told, and she realized that new legends were being created in front of her eyes. M'ress began to dream...

THE END

THE ENCOUNTER

by Anne Elizabeth Zeek

1. He: I have my duty,
duty to this man who leads,
duty to the Federation.
What can there be so rare,
so overpowering in its conception
that it can tempt me from this man,
this Federation?
What logic is there in
in turning aside from home,
from ordained place,
to venture on unknown paths
among strange stars?
How can I leave my self,
how can you ask?
That path is closed for me.

And yet...

2. She: I have my duty,
duty to my father's name,
duty to my lord.
What can there be so fine,
so achingly strong in needy fire
that it can tempt me forget home
for one man's touch?
How can control be lost
so completely
that one man's word
becomes my bond,
my soul?
I cannot trust you thus,
The price would be too high
should you be false.

And yet...

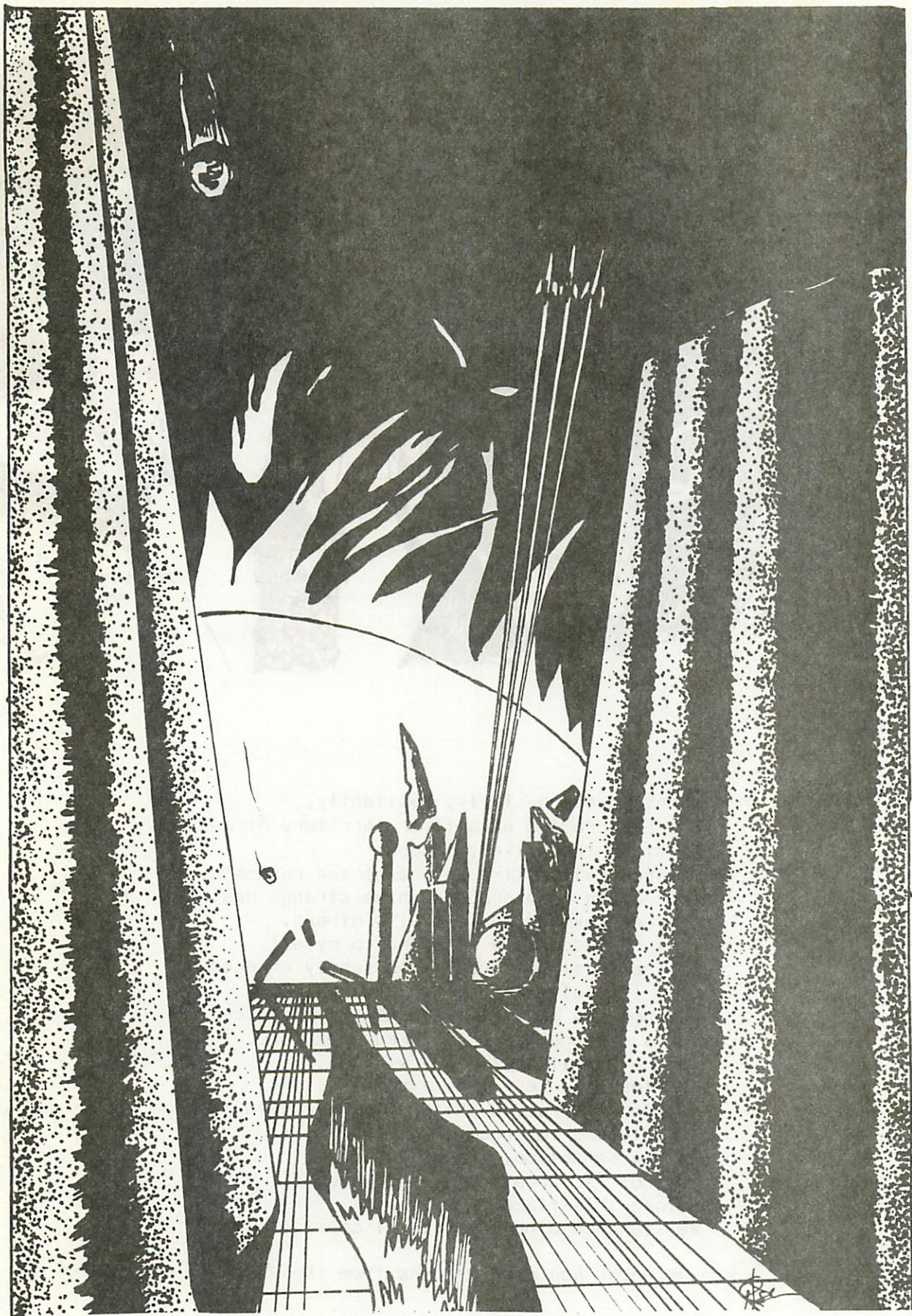
3. They: We have duty,
ties we cannot break.
More than war parts us now.
There is no bridge.

And yet...



Hands approach slowly, hesitantly,
And explore the unfamiliar territory of another's face.
We stand transfixed, trapped
Trapped out of time by unexpected response.
Your alien hand arouses in me strange desires -
Desires unknown, unfeared with others.
I stand suddenly a stranger to myself,
The reflection in your eyes subtly changed
From the self I know.
The hollows and the contours of your face
Are a strange new world I must explore.
(Damnation lies within - without.)
As flesh touches flesh a spark is lit.
My fingers trace a pattern on your skin and the flames flare,
Threatening to engulf us both
In new sensation, in new desires.
Control is threatened, logic undone
Before this flame.
We stand enjoined, yet still apart.

And a new universe has been created from the fire of this moment.



DE ROMULANI

by THOMAS NORBERRY GORSE and ANNE ELIZABETH ZEEK

Ten thousand years before the union of the Upper and Lower Kingdoms of the Nile River, a dynamic interplanetary civilization existed in a no longer identifiable star system. The peoples of this sun-system were humanoid, evolved from a lemur-like ancestor. They possessed remarkable mental abilities, but were aggressive, blatantly warlike, fiercely competitive. Their society depended on atomic power, and they stood on the verge of discovering warp drive technology with its inevitable conquest of interstellar distances.

Disaster struck swiftly and overwhelmingly. It is now unknown if the disaster which overtook these nameless people was natural or self-induced. Oral tradition and myths retain elusive allusions to "fire rain," "the killing waste" and "shadow death." The poetic descriptions could equally refer to a sun going nova or to interplanetary warfare.

The only "fact" surviving from this myth-shrouded time is the knowledge that the homeplanet of these people was rendered uninhabitable, and local interplanetary colonies were unable to support the populace fleeing disaster when the sun itself no longer offered them sustenance. A knowledge of the true events of this time of suffering is lost even to psychic recall, so inbred is the trauma of disaster and loss.

Forced to extra-ordinary lengths by the need to ensure racial survival, the people of this doomed star-system had barely enough time to equip a number of generation and sleeper ships. From a single location in the galaxy, they sent their frail craft out in all directions. Many ships met unforeseeable dangers and were destroyed; others were lost beyond call, and perhaps continue their unending search for a new world. After long millenia, some few ships found planets capable of sustaining life, and the seed of these refugees from beyond space and time, from a now unknown star, was planted throughout the galaxy.

In almost all cases where planet-fall was achieved, reversion to the primitive occurred within the first few generations. Some newly seeded colonies were lost during these first difficult years. For the remainder, the reascension to space-going civilizations was long and arduous. Many years were required before the skills and the knowledge necessary to become space-going peoples again were regained. It would take many centuries, but it could be done. And for these peoples, what could be done, would be done.

The descendants of this ancient peoples most familiar to the members of the Federation are the Vulcans. Their distant brothers, the Romulans, are more heavily shrouded in mystery. Completely unknown to the Federation until the past century, the full story of the Romulans is only now being revealed.

* * * * *

Fleeing destruction, a single generation ship reached the double-star system known to the Federation as Romulus-Romii. Revolving around the white dwarf member of the binary was a twin planet system. This system was inhospitable, but it was, if barely, habitable. The generation ship could go no further. Too many pieces of delicate engineering equipment had worn out and could not be replaced. Hospitable or not, this system would now be home.

The refugees landed on that planet we call Romulus. They themselves named the double-star system *Nardath-sh'leagh*, the All-Seeing Eyes of Nardath (Nardath in their mythological system being the greatly feared ruler of their hell-equivalent). Their new home planet they named *Tsaimat*, the bitter world. Its sister planet they called *Naimat*, the bitter twin. Their name for themselves was simply *Taleschi*, the people of doom.

* * * * *

Tsaimat proved to be, indeed, a "bitter world." Smaller than Earth, its high preponderance of heavy elements gives it a higher density and a corresponding gravity of 1.517. It has a viable oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere with a slightly higher proportion of carbon-dioxide than Earth-normal. The temperature range is more extreme than Earth's and the average daily temperature is higher. The day is 28.572 hours long. There are six seasons of unequal length: two short growing seasons, two very long hot, dry seasons, a wet season, and a mild winter. There are three satellites in eccentric orbits about Tsaimat, two about Naimat.

Tsaimat is a dry, water-poor world. There are no true oceans, the three largest bodies of water being completely land-locked. The brackish water of these "oceans" is undrinkable. Only during the short wet season, the Time of the Blooming Desert, is there a sufficiency of moisture. During this time, transitory bodies of water (e.g., the Sea of Cha, the Winter Sea, etc.) appear and the deserts do, indeed, bloom in short-lived profusion.

Although there are several extremely tall mountain ranges, much of the land of Tsaimat is composed of mica and quartz deserts which possess their own severe beauty. Arable land is scarce and jealously guarded. Tsaimat is rich in ores and precious minerals, but land-poor and barely capable of self-sustenance.

With the at times crucial lack of water, elaborate water ceremonies have sprung up - many quasi-religious in nature. The few sources of pure drinking water are guarded carefully all year round. Racial memories, myths, and ritual ceremonies all indicate that the planet on which the Taleschi were spawned had a much higher water/land ratio than does Tsaimat. Despite the intervening years the Taleschi have not adapted fully to Tsaimat. Life on their original home first evolved in its oceans, and the Taleschi still carry its salts and minerals within their bodies. To this day the Taleschi couch many of their images in terms of water images.

* * * * *

After landfall, the descent to savagery was particularly swift for the Taleschi. Within four generations the Great Migration was but an epic poem and the Before Time had assumed the properties of a golden age of wonder.

Life on Tsaimat was anything but easy. Climate, geography, natural radiation: all served to produce an environment in which only the strong could survive. The violent nature of the Taleschi, which had not altered despite their hegira, added to the hardship. Internecine warfare and a harsh environment almost destroyed these outcasts yet a second time.

Arable lands and herds of live-stock (replicated and developed from fertilized ova carefully preserved in the biology lab of the generation ship) became the signs of wealth. Fertile land was so rare it was never allowed to become personal property. Instead, land and livestock were held in common in Family Holdings, with control over use and development accorded to each Family Head.

A rather anarchic society was established, with each Family completely independent of all law save Family dogma. Political marriages and wholesale feuds became common as the Taleschi, their combativeness undimmed, battled among themselves for positions of power.

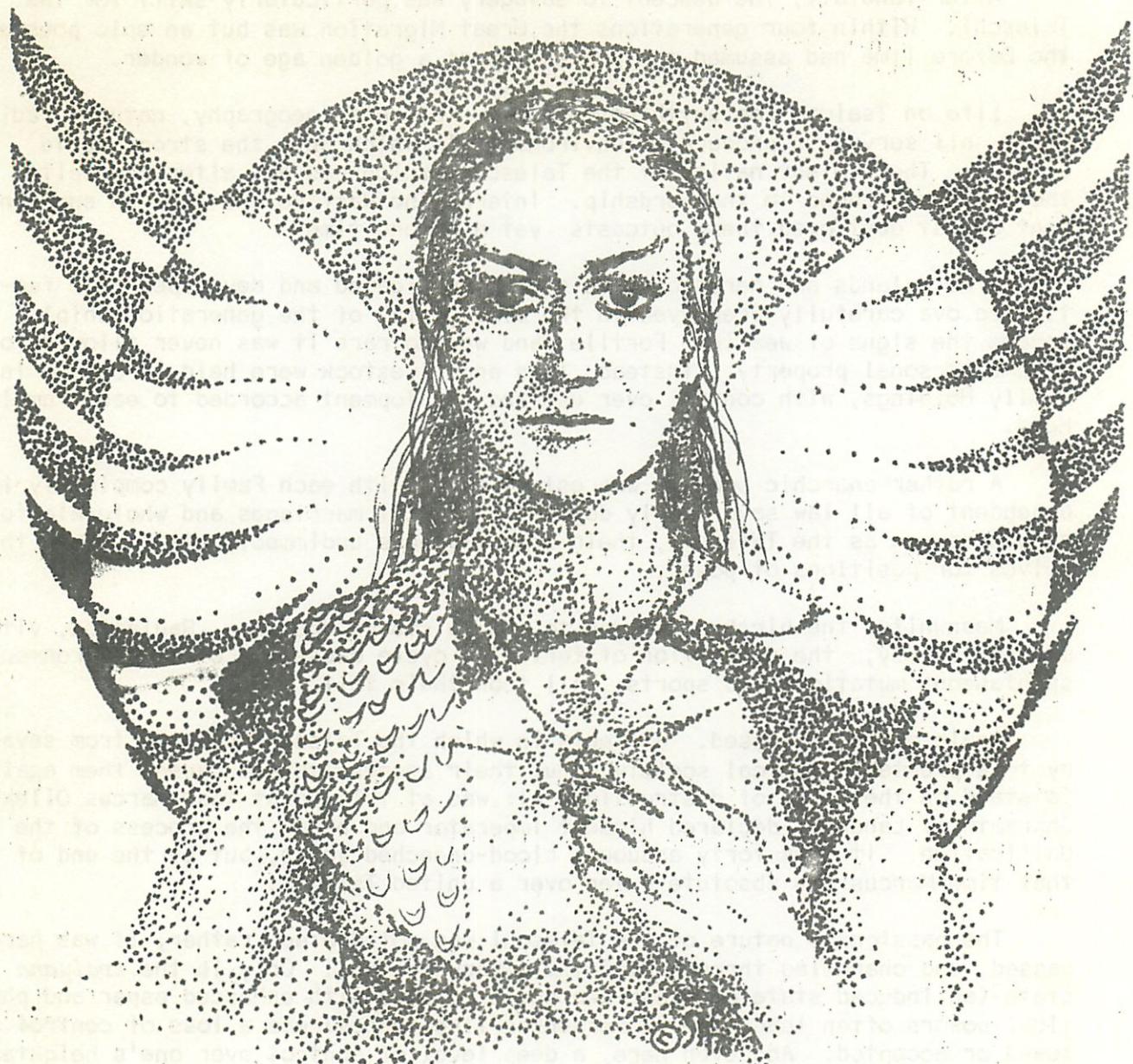
Meanwhile, the birthrate began to show a steady decline. Radiation, vitamin deficiency, the disruption of fertility cycle caused by a new environment, spontaneous mutations and sports: all took their toll.

Again millenia passed. Millenia in which the Taleschi climbed from savagery to a pre-technological society. But their aggressiveness caused them again to stand on the verge of destruction. It was at this point that Marcus Dilex, Shansath of Landarr, declared himself Imperator and began the process of the Unification. It took forty arduous, blood-drenched years, but by the end of that time Marcus was absolute ruler over a united Tsaimat.

The passionate nature of the Taleschi was not denied; rather, it was harnessed and channeled through strict military control. Only in the *traiyana* state (an induced state of hyper-awareness coupled with enhanced esper and physical powers often leading to a berserker-like frenzy) was a loss of control allowed or accepted. And even here, a deep level of control over one's heightened actions was expected.

Family Holdings remained important after the Unification, but a semi-feudal monarchial system now overlay the anarchic pattern of earlier days. With internecine warfare outlawed, the Taleschi carved out a more secure hold on Tsaimat. The lost arts and sciences which had taken them to space were gradually recovered. From one small, barren planet they expanded until, by the time they made contact with the Federation, the Taleschi had carved out an Interstellar Empire ruled from the HomeWorld of Tsaimat. Nine star systems and twenty-three inhabited planets and satellites, including five subject races, were under the control of the Imperator.

*Transcript from introductory chapters
of The Romulan Emoire In Flux: An
Overview, by Zeek and Gorse, Terra, 97*



THE

CY THEREAN CYCLE

anne elizabeth zeek

Cytherea... an ancient Romulan word with many complex philosophical connotations. Its most obvious usage is in describing the basic underlying obversion of a given situation. That which seems to be, is not, that which seems to be not, is. This concept underlies all relationships, on many levels. It inextricably threads its way through the story which follows...

* * * * *

PART ONE: LAREESHA

CHAPTER ONE: I, Lareesha, she whose name means "silver jewel of the night," have been in training to be a warrior since before my years numbered ten. I come from an old family, a proud family, with roots that go back to the Great Migration itself. During all that time, we of Dalividian stock have served the Empire loyally, honestly, ably. We have been statesmen without being politicians, leaders of men without being dynasts. We have sought power, but only to serve.

No family is more respected, more honored. We were bred, we are bred, to serve the Imperator and the State. Rebellion. Revolution. Disobedience. Such words are abstract concepts I cannot begin to comprehend. Why then, was I, the first Dalividian warrior in one thousand full cycles to have suffered defeat, disgrace, capture, why was I now temporizing and finding it difficult to comply with the Imperator's wishes in a matter which could restore to me at least some small share of lost honor?

The ProConsul was striding angrily back and forth before me. Coming to a stop, he leaned forward on the desk which stood between us. "SubCommander," he demanded, "what is wrong? It is bad enough that as a female of child-bearing age you remain unmated and empty of child! But that you, a Dalividian, the last of the family since your brother's death, should refuse to mate in this manner is... is... by the Horned Demon of Mardon, woman, it is actionable treason." With that, the ProConsul pounded on his field-desk so mightily that several large folios, state papers by their appearance, were knocked to the floor.

I continued to stand at attention, but refused to meet the probing, angry questioning of his eyes. It was impossible for me to respond to the deliberate provocation of his words. Within my heart there had grown during the last several years a small seed of doubt, doubt as to the rightness of my continuing refusal to wed, doubt as to my reasons.

The ProConsul straightened and shook his head wearily. "At ease, SubCommander," he said, and I could see him laying aside the role of superior officer. Pulling out a chair, he sat down heavily at the desk. "Lareesha, why? Why do you persist in this selfish course of action? Will you deny the Imperator the security of Dalividian support? To whom will he turn in future years if not to you and your child? Lareesha, give the Imperator a child of your blood, that he may continue secure, knowing himself protected. Do not let the Dalividian line die here, with you unknown to man and barren of child."

I tried to argue his words into nothingness. "ProConsul, the line does not die with me. What of my kin, children of father's father's brother? They are, after all, of Dalividian blood."

He waved my argument away with a gesture of his hand. "Bah! A cadet lateral branch of the family with no pretensions to glory. The elders prematurely senile natterers, the young of warrior age cowards and complete nonentities."

"It is true my cousins have never distinguished themselves, but there have been no actual slurs on their bravery. They are... they are considered to be competent."

"Competent! By the Horned Demon, woman!", the ProConsul swore again by his favorite god, "What has competence to do with the matter? The Dalividia accept nothing less than greatness! Should the Imperator be willing to accept in your place someone so lacking in all leadership qualities that he has never passed the rank of Third Level Centurion?

"Lareesha," he continued, "twice you have shown yourself worthy of the rank of SubCommander. You are only months away from an appointment to the rank of Commander. To have been appointed Commander *once* at your age were an honor; twice is unheard of. Can you honestly expect the State to willingly forego the genetic heritage you carry within your body? Should the Empire accept mediocrity when it can have greatness?"

I flinched at his words. Turning away, I said despairingly, "Greatness! What manner of greatness is it by which I disgrace my name, my rank, and the State with my stupidity and gross mishandling of a serious enemy action! What pride shall I have in once more serving as Commander? Once were enough! I deserved to have been executed for treason rather than merely broken down to Centurion First. It is through *my* error that the enemy has knowledge of what had been potentially our greatest weapon. Why, then, does the Imperator do me honor now?"

Getting up from his desk, the ProConsul walked over to me. He turned me towards himself and, forcing my head up, he looked bleakly into my eyes. "Do we come to the heart of the matter at last? Lareesha, do you still blame yourself for what happened six years ago when our territory was invaded and our defenses breached? Do you still persist in taking the blame upon yourself that, through lies and trickery, alien spies were able to steal our cloaking device and learn its secrets? My daughter, is *this* the burden you carry?"

I looked steadily back at ProConsul Tuarek of the Romulan Star Empire. - Praetor, Quaestor... and my father.

"Should I not remember that I brought dishonor and defeat to the Dalividia? For centuries, no warrior of the Dalividia was defeated, or taken prisoner by an enemy. My brother Haroc died by his own hand rather than suffer defeat and surrender. I not only allowed the enemy to escape with our cloaking device, I also allowed myself to be caught in a trap like any raw recruit and be taken prisoner aboard the *Enterprise*. Should I allow the seed of a dolt and bungler to be perpetuated? I am afraid the Dalividia blood runs thin in my veins, my father."

"Lareesha," Tuarek tried to reason with me, "there was a full-scale inves-

tigation of the cloaking device incident. You were found innocent of any deliberate act of treason or sabotage. The only charge against you was one of miscalculation and an error in judgement. And even there, the Tribunal Council admitted that your need for blood vengeance to weigh against Haroc's death may have greatly affected your assessment of the situation.

"Since that time, your rapid re-promotion has been earned by the skill and superiority you have shown in the field. To refuse to recognize that skill, and your talent for command, would be a senseless waste. Forget the past. You have a future to build."

Tuarek paused, then went on. "Moreover, the cloaking device is not even of major importance now, Lareesha. Our scientists have developed a sensor capable of detecting a star-ship with the cloaking-device in use. And Intelligence reports from the Federation indicate that their scientists have had similar success. It would appear, my daughter, that our respective 'cloaks of invisibility' have been torn asunder."

"I know your words are true, my father. I also know to be true the fact that... that 'military secrets are the most fleeting of all'. But I cannot help feeling I failed the Imperator... and you."

"Lareesha, believe me, it is only yourself who continues to place blame for an incident over and done with years ago. Your handling of the recent conflict on Nbara has recommended you highly to the Council. Warriors are proud to serve under your command. In all but the matter of your mating, the Imperator is highly pleased with you. All should be well for you, my daughter."

"And you, my father," I asked him bluntly, "goes it well for you that Haroc my brother, first-born of the Dalividia line, destroyed himself through an act of kamshaya rather than surrender to the enemy? and I meanwhile continue to live even after defeat and captivity? Do you not wish it were otherwise, that family honor might be satisfied?"

My father cupped my face in his hands with that innate gentleness he has shown to none save myself and L'Ranya, his consort and my mother.

"Lareesha, so eager were you to be born, you burst betimes from your mother's womb. From the moment I saw you, a babe so small she could be crushed in one hand, who nevertheless hurled her defiance at an uncaring universe, I was proud to be your father. And from the moment you grasped my fingers to pull yourself erect and survey your world, I was your slave. Haroc was my son and my heir and I was indeed proud of him. I will mourn him until my days shall cease. But, Lareesha," Tuarek grew even more serious, "I would not have had you die even had you been as guilty as you seem to fear. You are my daughter, and I would not lose you."

I felt the emotion and truth behind Tuarek's words, and was momentarily silenced. Giving an embarrassed laugh to break the unmilitary mood into which we had fallen, the ProConsul said, "But this conversation is pointless, my daughter. You are guilty of no crimes, of no offenses."

When I tried to interpose again he gripped my shoulders and said only, "Lareesha, trust me. On this matter I am closer to the truth than you are. If,

however, you find yourself unable to accept my words; go to see Torandor. The High Priest may be able to help you see things more clearly. Meanwhile, my daughter, ponder my words and consider your duty to the state. Go now, and think over what we have discussed here to-day" Tuarek kissed my forehead and made the ritual gesture of leave-taking.

I bade farewell to Tuarek both as daughter and as subordinate. His abrupt leave-taking did not upset me. I knew that he had been emotionally affected by my role in, and reaction to, the activities of six years ago. However, he had tried to keep such emotions hidden. Embarrassment had caused him to cut short our confrontation without even extracting a promise of obedience from me regarding an imminent choice of mate.

I left that section of the Old Palace where the ProConsul's quarters were located. Passing readily through the sentry post, set now on minimal power, I headed out into the blistering glare of the white dwarf sun around which Romulus and its constant companion Remus revolve. The long hot season, the Time of the Burning Leaves, had begun. It was not yet mid-morning, and already the air shimmered in the heat. By the hour of Nardath, when the sun would stand directly overhead, the heat and the oppressively bright light would be almost unendurable.

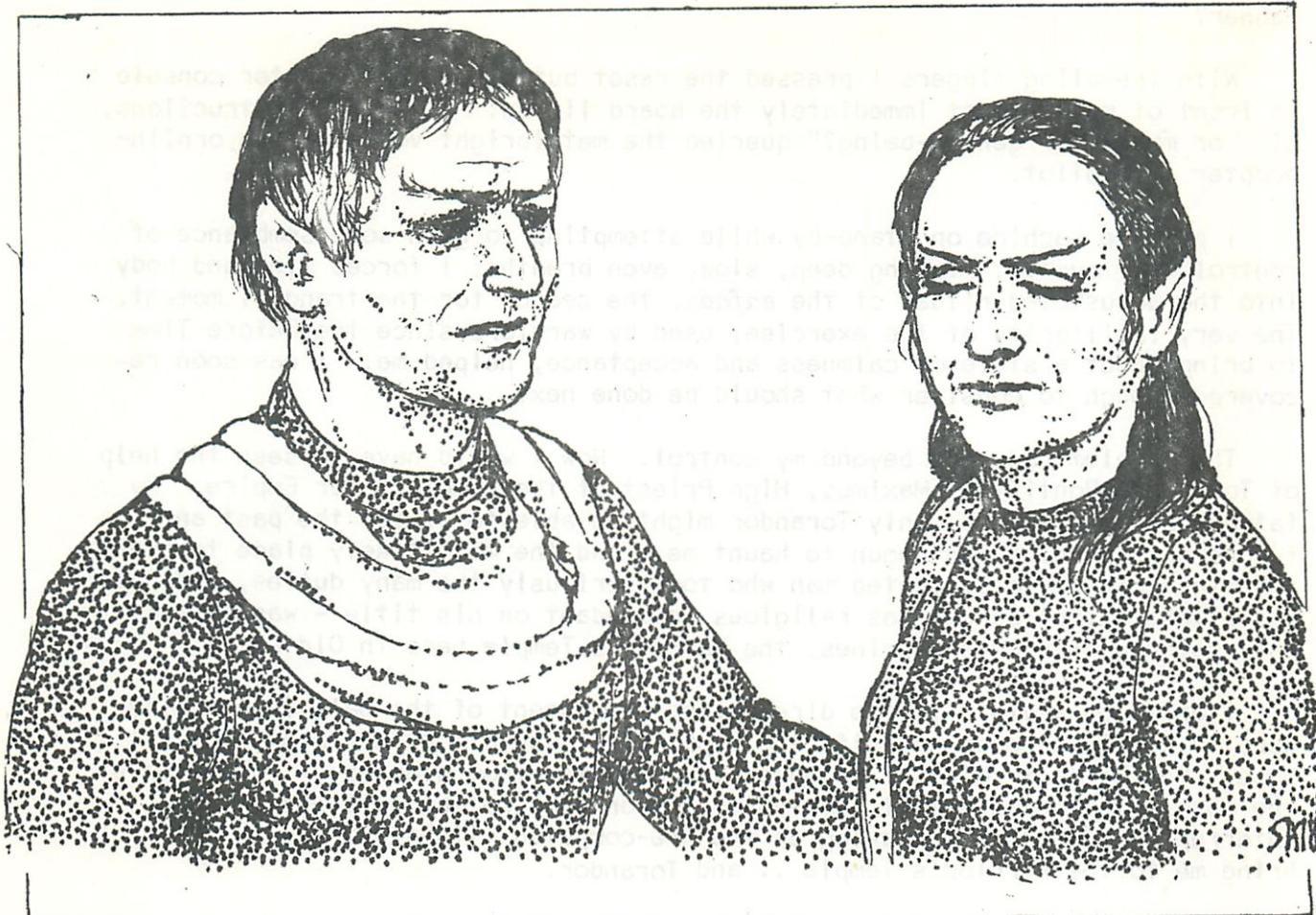
I decided to return to my quarters. On-duty military personnel were stationed in the huge billeting complex located on the Plains of Ishmahun, just outside the walls of Old City. Because of the distance and the already oppressive heat, I hailed a hovering ornithocopter.

Boarding the vehicle, I fed into its control console the bearings which would take me to the Officer's Gate of the military compound. The ornithocopter was completely computerized. I held my identification tag up to the tele-viewing screen of the computer. Simultaneously, I pressed my right hand against the scanning plate for print and pore comparison. Since all was in order, the ornithocopter noted the fare charges to my citizen's account and took off.

I sat back with a sigh, glad to be free at last of the ProConsul's discerning eyes. During our interview, I had kept tight control over myself. I had not wanted him to know just how serious my problem had become in recent months.

It was more than doubt of past actions which had been troubling me lately. Strange thoughts and feelings were beginning to intrude on my mind. Now, in my relief at being away from Tuarek, I relaxed too quickly. Immediately I was inundated by the sensations I'd been keeping at bay by will-power alone. Strange colors, sounds, sights, fragrances vied for my attention. Mixed with these strangenesses were the taste of music, the color of sorrow, the sound of dark, the smell of vermillion. My perceptions became inextricably interwoven, wed, joined.

Greenness,
And blue,
And even deeply redgoldorange,
Are he.



Sunbright and giltsky on thislikeday,
Thirstparched sunbeasts mica deserts roam,
Are he.

Rainwind and clouddark on thislikenight,
Hell's hounds reignchill bonequi
Are he.

But seas mostall,
Maned starburnt warrior roams,
Seas mostall
Are he.

Eternity twice eternal,
Paradisal damnation,
Totality in finite summation infinite,
Are he.

Hearteverin minealways,
Never mine own
Is he.

"No! No!", my voice, grown ragged in denying the inexplicable phenomena and my responses, brought me back to some semblance of rational thought. But I could no longer deny what was happening to me. My body was still being rocked by violent spasms as I fought my way back to reality. It was now painfully obvious that even my reasoning was being affected. Soon I would no longer be fit for duty. How could I explain to the ProConsul being defeated by

spirit thoughts which attacked without warning in no readily comprehensible manner?

With trembling fingers I pressed the reset button on the computer console in front of me. Almost immediately the board lit up. "Your new instructions, sir, or madam, or gentle-being?" queried the metalbright voice of the ornithocopter auto-pilot.

I put the machine on stand-by while attempting to gain some semblance of control over myself. Taking deep, slow, even breaths, I forced mind and body into the accustomed ritual of the *safada*, the search for the tranquil moment. The very familiarity of the exercise, used by warriors since the Before Time to bring about a state of calmness and acceptance, helped me. I was soon recovered enough to consider what should be done next.

The problem had gone beyond my control. Now I would have to seek the help of Torandor, Pontificus Maximus, High Priest of the Romulan Star Empire. My father had been right. Only Torandor might be able to dispel the past and future ghosts which had begun to haunt me. And the most likely place to seek the High Priest - a dedicated man who took seriously the many duties, medical and psychological as well as religious, attendant on his title - was at that most revered of Romulan shrines, the Warrior's Temple here in Old City.

I grimaced wryly. If the direct line of descent of the Daliividia family were to continue beyond myself, the High Priest was almost certainly my last hope. Making up my mind, I released the computer from stand-by. I then gave the auto-pilot a new set of bearings. The ornithocopter continued on its interrupted flight after taking up the pre-computed flight pattern that would bring me to the Warrior's Temple... and Torandor.

* * * * *

CHAPTER TWO: The air trip across town to the Temple was uneventful. Running on a modified anti-gravity system, the ornithocopter provided a smooth, even, quick ride over the Old City. The grid-like layout of the city spread below me, and I could easily have asked that any section of it be shown in greater detail on the viewing screen. However, being in no mood for idle sight-seeing, I left the screen on routine level one magnification, forward view.

Within minutes, the ornithocopter came to a stop before the towering West Facade of the Warrior's Temple. Automatic relays opened the door and lowered the landing steps. "Your destination, noble passenger," intoned the auto-pilot. I slowly disembarked, and waved the airvehicle off.

Squaring my shoulders, I straightened the stole of my uniform, took a deep breath, and prepared to enter the Temple. Determined not to succumb to unknown pressures again, I set about the task before me with calm deliberation. I walked measuredly to the huge cast metal gates which, with their depictions of some of the most glorious moments of Romulan history, formed the Western Portico. I returned the salute of the young recruit standing honor guard duty, then waited while he pressed the release controls for the heavy gates. The gates slowly opened.

I entered the Temple. Although no artificial cooling aids were used in the interior, I could feel a noticeable drop in temperature the minute I walked into the building. The *chemos* rock of which it had been built was an excellent natural insulant, serving as an effective heat barrier during the hot season, yet retaining warmth during the cold season.

The Temple was one of the most important buildings in the governmental capital of Old City. It housed a huge complex of interconnected buildings, corridors, and pathways. Its functions were many-faceted. The major religious shrine and altar of the Romulan people was located here, as were the finest hospital facilities on the Home Planet and the most complete psychological and parapsychological laboratories in the Empire.

I stood now on the threshold of the double-storied main entry hall, its many doors leading to various facilities throughout the complex. As I waited for my eyes to adjust to the sudden change in light, the Temple being in subdued shadow compared to the glare outside, I mentally reacquainted myself with the general layout of the building.

Directly ahead of me was a celrestoried pathway leading to an open courtyard beyond which was the huge pantheistic temple to which all Romulans, regardless of the god they worshipped, were welcome at any hour, day or night, whenever there was need. Off to my right was the immense, semi-circular structure of the South Wing, separated from the main body of the Temple by a cloistered walkway. Here were located research facilities, treatment areas, and medical offices.

To my left was a long, narrow passageway lined with offices, leading to the semi-attached structure of the North Wing. Here were found psychology research facilities, parapsychological laboratories, and telekinetic monitoring stations. The knowledge and the equipment in this single location could cure almost any known mental illness or disturbance in the Empire - or could destroy a man's mind as easily as one destroys a fragile *jalith* crystal, that delicate mineral growth reduced to dust by the bare pressure of a breath.

While serving as commander, I had, on occasion, ordered that soldiers under my command be subjected to various Romulan probing devices, each in their own way more subtle and yet more vicious than the Klingon Mind-Sifter. I had never enjoyed giving such a cruel order, but had done so if it appeared warranted. Now, still suffering the aftereffects of my recent hallucinatory experience, I found myself wondering, irrationally, if the essences of the men I had destroyed thus remained in the halls.

A morbid thought, and not a particularly military one. I gave an involuntary shudder, straightened my shoulders deliberately, and entered the passageway leading to the North Wing. Torandor, High Priest of the Romulan Star Empire, had offices at the further end of this hall.

I approached the High Priest's suite of offices. A Centurion Fifth was stationed in a tiny alcove just opposite the door of the outer office. He sprang to attention when he saw me, and saluted sharply. He continued to stand at attention, clearly waiting for me to identify myself. I returned his salute and said, "Lareesha, SubCommander, Romulan Imperial Star Cruiser *Khat-era*. I am here to see the High Priest."

The young Centurion nodded, saluted once more, and briskly entered the High Priest's office. He returned before I even had time to decide whether my relief would outweigh my disappointment if Torandor were unable to see me to-day.

"SubCommander," the Centurion came to attention, if possible, even more smartly than before. "The Ponificus Maximus will see you now." He stood aside as I entered the office.

"Hador, return to your post," said the familiar voice of the High Priest. As the door closed behind the Centurion, Torandor approached me. Looking at me as searchingly as had the ProConsul, he meanwhile greeted me in the ritual manner. "SubCommander, you honor this Temple."

I, in turn, gave the ritual response of a supplicant seeking the guidance and wisdom of the High Priest. "My lord, it is you and this Temple which do give honor to me. I come to you now seeking the guidance and wisdom of the All. Grant me this, that I might know harmony again."

Torandor's arched brows raised fractionally as he assimilated the import of my words. He drew me into the inner office where his private counseling was done. This was a large, dimly-lit room with quietly unobtrusive furnishings chosen to project an aura of strength and stability to those troubled beings seeking the High Priest's help here.

I had been in this room several times, both as guest of Torandor, who was a very dear friend, and as military escort to one or another persons seeing the High Priest in his official capacity. Only once before had I been here on a matter of healing directly related to my own needs - that time six years ago when... but, no, I would not finish that thought.

The High Priest directed me towards a low-slung, cushioned chair. I sat down, and Torandor went to a hand-carved upright chair behind a large table which almost managed to disguise the fact that it was, in reality, a working desk.

Torandor sat down. He spoke unhurriedly of social affairs and family matters while arranging in front of himself on the desk several articles I could not clearly identify. As he spoke, I found myself start to relax, some of the tension ebbing from my body. Recognizing that my relaxation could be traced to the hypnotic qualities of Torandor's voice and to the empathic vibrations he was keying toward me, I looked appreciatively at the man who knew so unerringly how to use such subtle tools.

Torandor. Third most powerful man in the Empire. Only the Imperator and the Praetor had more power - or rather, it might be more correct to say that, in the minds of the people of the Empire, the Imperator and the Praetor stood second only to the High Priest. Yet a greater contrast could not be imagined than that which existed among the three men who stood at the apex of the Roman government.

The Imperator Trjex was a slender, stooped man resembling nothing so much as a scholar, an antiquarian, or even an ink-stained scribe. He did not in any way resemble the popular image of what he, as absolute ruler over an Em-

pire comprised of nine star systems and twenty-three inhabited planets and satellites, should look like. He was, however, generally considered a good ruler, being just, concerned, and learned. In domestic matters he was measured and responsible. It was only in his drive for interstellar glory and Romulan space supremacy that he acted less than reasonably. Unfortunately, before Tuarek was appointed Praetor eight years ago the position was filled by Darnal Quintus of the Riacularus family, a power-mad megalomaniac who encouraged the Imperator in many of his most unsuitable plans.

A more moderate political stand had been encouraged by Tuarek upon his ascendancy, and the unrest of several years ago had stilled. In general, the Imperator Trajex, who had served well during his military apprenticeship, had the respect of the majority of the Romulan troops.

Basically, however, he was honored and revered for his position and his family, rather than his person. The latter reverence, intense and personal, was reserved by the Romulan people for Tuarek, their Praetor and Quaestor. For Tuarek, the Romulan troops would willingly march into the Seventh Hell of Nepha, secure in the knowledge that he would get them out again.

Senses still being lulled by the High Priest's mesmerizing voice, I allowed my thoughts to dwell momentarily on my father. Tuarek - tall, broad-shouldered, handsomely aquiline in feature with black hair only slightly greyed at the temples - looked so regal that strangers to the highest government circles were apt to mistake him for the Imperator. And yet, despite adulation that in some cases bordered on idolatry, Tuarek was content, was proud to serve the Imperator in true Davidian fashion.

If my father's appearance was that of a Romulan military ideal, the High Priest's was almost unRomulan. Torandor was short, and rather heavier than is usually acceptable in a warrior people. His hair had silvered completely, and his face was heavily lined. At first glance, he seemed to be a rather unprepossessing individual. It was only on closer examination that one could see the depths in the eyes, the strength in the man - and it was in the hidden measure of this strength that his power lay.

The High Priest was not chosen by reason of political connections or family position. Nor was he chosen for military prowess or bravery. Rather, the attainment of the priestly levels is dependent on a fact of Romulan physiology and parapsychology that we have successfully hidden even from allied alien races. We Romulans share more than outward physical appearance with our distant brothers, the Vulcans. Like the Vulcans, we are in possession of certain extra-sensory abilities. (Indeed, since we do not place so high a value on personal mental solitude as do the Vulcans, in some instances we are gifted with an even higher degree of esper skills than they.) And it is the person with the highest degree of, and greatest control over, these always unreliable skills and powers who is appointed Pontifex Maximus of the Romulan Star Empire. For as long as I can remember, that position has been held by Torandor.

As though my thoughts had been steered by him, his voice brought me back from the mental maze in which I had been wandering. "Lareesha," he asked, "what troubles you? How may I help?"

Hesitantly, I began to tell the High Priest of my mental turmoil. "Torandor, my father and the Imperator insist I choose a mate next Trothing Day.

And yet, I cannot, in good faith, produce an heir for my father. I feel myself unworthy." His eyes asked my reason.

"Torandor, what of my actions six years ago? The first real test of my command ability, and I failed miserably."

"Lareesha, what has brought that incident so sharply to mind?"

I paused, then hesitantly replied, "I do not know. I have always been disturbed at my failure - or at what I have perceived to be a failure. It was only the inhibition which you placed in my mind which kept me from *kamshaya*, from ritual suicide. Now once again the memories of that time are growing in importance until they threaten to overshadow my life. My failure six years ago seems inextricably bound to my decision to mate. I give myself reasons for my actions, but I do not know if the reasons are valid. I only know that I will not, I cannot mate with any of those who have sought my smiles on the Day of Trothing. I have tried, Torandor, but the image of...that day always stands in my way. And now I grow frightened of the strange pattern of my thoughts lately. Am I going mad?" I went on to describe the disorientation of the images I had found in my mind.

Torandor pushed a small artifact to the fore of his desk. A *hkorus* crystal, brilliantly oscillating and flashing rainbow hues, hung suspended between two bars of gleaming metal. The High Priest flicked the crystal almost carelessly with his finger. "Lareesha, look deep within this stone. "What do you see?"

I glanced casually in the direction he indicated. Immediately, my eyes were caught and held by the coruscating colors of the *hkorus* stone. I could not move. I was mesmerized by the movement and the kaleidoscopic color changes thrown off by the crystal. So entrapt was I, I was scarcely aware of the movement when Torandor got up from his desk. He came behind me and stood there. Faintly, like the delicate touch of a moon-flyer's wings, I sensed Torandor's fingers on my temples as he placed his hands in the age-old ritual position used to enhance the melding of our minds.

Light though his touch was, it kept my gaze straight ahead, focused on the pulsating *hkorus* crystal. His words filtered dimly into my consciousness. "Lareesha, look. Look deeply now within the stone. See how the *hkorus* stone of life shifts with every nuance of existence. Our perceptions of events are colored by its rainbow hues. Even our moods and reactions take on its colors - red, green, blue, gold, grey, silver, grey, yellow. Each turn of the crystal reveals a new design - the same colors but in different combinations. The colors brighten to a vibrant intensity, or fade to a pastel wash. All depends on the facet of the *hkorus* stone through which we view reality. And when the *hkorus* crystal revolves for a last time, the colors will flow together to form the deep black of all colors, yet no color. There is no way to escape, for we are bound to the fate reflected in the broken images refracted by the *hkorus* crystal's ever-shifting heart."

With Torandor's words in my ears and the shifting colors of the *hkorus* stone beating on my eyes, I soon became oblivious to the world without. There existed for me only the elusive, eternally shifting pin-points of variegated lights. On the periphery of consciousness I heard Torandor yet again. "Look, Lareesha, look."

The flickering lights thrown off by the *hkoros* stone grew stronger, brighter, until they lanced painfully into every part of my mind. I was being dissected neatly, clinically, completely. The ever-shifting lights, brighter even than the Romulan sun, lay bare that which had been hidden, even from self. I could not look away.

The colors played across my awareness in no discernible pattern. But wait. If I looked closer there, just there - was that a face? And there, another face? And there, was that - no! no!! I did not, would not see that! I would not see *his* face, not the face haunting my hidden thoughts for six long years. I did not see him. I would not see him. I would not. I would see only the colors, the shifting, ambient colors, the sparkling, scintillating lights - the greens, the oranges, the golds, the reds, and - - -

Blueness
filtering through prismatic lenses
of eyes unseeing
and pooled
pooled
with saline tears
mirroring only
blueness...

Indigo
Carving scars that cannot heal
in flesh burning
and writhing
in its own-created
hell
shaded in indigo...
indigo...
Marine
shading
deepest ocean floors
to which
haunting and mournful
sea-maids
sing whispered songs
that draw those
who seek Death
marine...

I drown in blue crystal seas.

I drown...

I drown... I drown... I...
one moment

I was suddenly, painfully brought back to full awareness. Torandor stood over me, concern in his eyes, hand upraised to deliver yet another hard slap to my face. He lowered his hand when he saw reason looking out from my eyes once more. "Are you returned to us then, Lareesha?"

I flexed my hand affirmatively. Then I shook my head slightly from side to side in an attempt to dispel the lingering sense of unreality. I quickly stopped, however, when a sudden sharp pain lanced through my skull. My head

was now throbbing unmercifully, my eyes were burning and had the heavy feel of unwept tears, my body felt as drained as though I had been at berserker tension or on esper overload for too long a period of time. I ran my hands over my body, reassuring myself that I was there, intact.

I looked at Torandor questioningly. If meld had been achieved, and with his talent there was no reason it would not have been, he had shared this most recent, most shattering experience. "

"Torandor, what - what is happening to me? If I just knew *what* was happening, and *why*, I could bear it more readily. You have known me since the day of my birth. I am no weakling, no coward. But to be at the mercy of these strange thoughts which come without warning... do you wonder that I refuse to obey my father's order to mate? What is happening to me?"

Torandor straightened, wearily flexing his shoulders. "Lareesha, what do you remember of the melding we just experienced?"

"Only scattered impressions and isolated pieces of information. A mosaic of brightly colored lights that seemed to shift and dissolve into new patterns every time I tried to focus on them, flickering faces that seemed to mirror rainbowed emotions. And something else..."

I paused to marshall my thoughts, then continued, "Something even more strange than all that has gone before. Something vague and nebulous, seen only out of the corner of my mind's eye. Something that appeared to be... to be an entity, a presence. Something biding, waiting for I know not what. But somehow, what I am, what I do, is crucial for this entity's designs."

I hesitated, then asked, "Torandor, is it *lateeyya*, possession? Has a bodyless entity decided to take over the housing that is my body? Is it trying to drive my essence from this body with these strange attacks of unreason and madness?"

Torandor knelt by my chair. Taking one of my hands in both of his, he sighed heavily. "I wish it were that simple, Lareesha. A bodyless being, attaching itself to you during your last space voyage - we have come across such entities in the past and know the proper procedures to dispel them. No, it is not *lateeyya* that confronts us now, but something of an infinitely more crucial nature."

Such circumlocution was unlike Torandor. "Torandor, of what do you speak?"

"Lareesha, dependent on the choices you will be making within the next three days, within the month you may be dead. Within the year, the Empire may be destroyed. This, also, is dependent on the choice you make, and on the road you choose to follow hereinafter."

The High Priest's words staticked meaninglessly about my ears as my world dissolved in blackness.

CHAPTER THREE: I woke slowly, the blackness gradually lifting, the words of Torandor still reverberating in my ears. "Within the month you may be dead, within the year the Empire may be destroyed." Had the High Priest indeed given voice to such a prophecy of doom? Or had my senses been submitted to yet another hallucinatory image, this one audial?

I was lying on a cushioned surface. gingerly raising my head, I looked about me. I felt some slight disorientation, some dizziness when I moved my head, but no pain this time. Carefully raising myself on one elbow, I looked for Torandor.

The High Priest was standing before the farthest wall in a position of deep thought. His hands were clasped behind his back, and he rocked slowly back and forth on the balls of his feet while his gaze stared fixedly ahead at nothing.

Something, perhaps the slight sound I made in trying to raise myself to a sitting position, attracted his attention and he turned. Seeing me awake, he crossed to the servator behind his desk and pushed an encoded series of buttons. Almost immediately, an answering tone sounded from the mechanism and the serving doors flashed open. A crystalline bottle filled with a glowing amber liquid stood on the formex grid along with a matched set of drinking glasses. Torandor took decanter and glasses from the servator and placed them on his desk. Filling one of the glasses, he turned to bring it over to me.

I rose to my feet unsteadily. I was determined to face the worst. My thoughts were tinged with deepest embarrassment and chagrin. That I, warrior bred, warrior trained, should have fainted like a pusillanimous Omaranian, like a trembling Vendorian, was unacceptable. What must the High Priest think of me? My disgrace would seem a growing thing. Had I forgotten what it meant to be Romulan in that encounter six years ago? I awaited Torandor's words of contempt.

However, he came up to me with only care and concern in his eyes.

"Lareesha," he said gently, "here. Drink this *silyada*. It will help restore you to yourself, that we might talk."

I accepted the proffered glass in silent gratitude. Torandor stood waiting while I slowly drank the honey-smooth liquid derived from the golden berries of the *dalaje*.

Crossing to the desk once again, Torandor now filled both glasses from the decanter. Turning, he passed his hands across the moired grey surface of the wall behind the desk.

The seemingly solid wall disappeared, leaving behind the faint shimmer of a full-strength force-field. A walled garden could be seen through the shimmer. With another wave of Torandor's hand, the force-field's glow also disappeared.

Picking up both glasses, Torandor turned to me. He held out my refilled glass.

"Come. Let us walk in the garden," he said.

I crossed over to him. Accepting the glass a second time, I followed him out of the room. I had never been in this garden so surprisingly revealed, and was delighted to find it unexpectedly cool despite the heat of the day. Moreover, it was lush and verdant even though the yearly burn-off of vegetation had begun.

Nictitating my inner eye-lid slightly and shading my eyes further against the glare with my free hand, I looked skyward. I was able to discern a faint tell-tale glimmer of silvered-gold transparency overhead. The sun shone brightly through this transparency, a rare form of *chemos* stone, but its heat was considerably diminished. As a result, the garden was refreshingly cool, and plant growth encouraged even during the Time of the Burning Leaves.

Torandor and I walked down a path lined with spice-fragrant *djalabe*, velvet leaved *kheros*, and star-flowered *rredanth*. He led me to a satin smooth expanse of green-sward beneath a small stand of *tilmar*. Here, the sun's bright light filtered blue-green through the over-hanging canopy of large, fan-shaped leaves.

A stone bench was under the largest tree. Torandor seated himself and I indicated I should join him. Instead, I chose to sit cross-legged at his feet.

For a minute longer we sat there in silence, each sipping thoughtfully at the *silyada*. As Torandor had promised, the golden beverage had been most beneficial. I felt less distraught, less devastated. My warrior-heritage was again asserting itself, and I felt more ready to accept my duty, my destiny.

I opened the conversation. "Torandor, your words sound strangely on my ears. What possible explanation can there be for so sweeping a message of doom? And how does my death - or non-death - affect the course of the Empire?"

Torandor's gaze held mine for a space of time in which to measure the universe. Then he said quietly, "Lareesha, before I entered Mind Touch with you I thought that the recent experiences you had described to me were a temporary aberration due, perhaps, to the pressures you feel yourself to be under in finding a suitable mate. These pressures could easily have resulted in a break-through of the defenses and inhibitions placed around your guilt responses six years ago."

The High Priest paused, picking his words carefully. He then continued. "But, Lareesha, you are not simply going through an emotional crisis. What you sense is the actual impingement of choice, of doom. You will shortly be faced with the need to make a decision - and your future, and the future of the Empire, will depend upon that decision. To choose wrongly is to risk doom. Doom for self, doom for Empire."

I started to make a gesture of protest at Torandor's doom-saying. Had such a burden been placed on any one warrior before? Surely he spoke in terms of symbols!

My protest was still-born as Torandor quietly added, "Lareesha, I have learned this through *shimut-sa'ada*."

Shimut-sa'ada. The search for the hidden truth, the gift of the all-seeing. A rarely used-parapsychological measure combining elements of clair-

voyance, telepathy, empathy, precognition. A "seeing" over which the adept has no conscious control. *Shimut-sa'ada* appeared without the volition of the adept and only in times of supreme importance for our entire race. Some referred to it as the granting of an oracle, some as the stirring of racial consciousness, others as manifestations of the group mind.

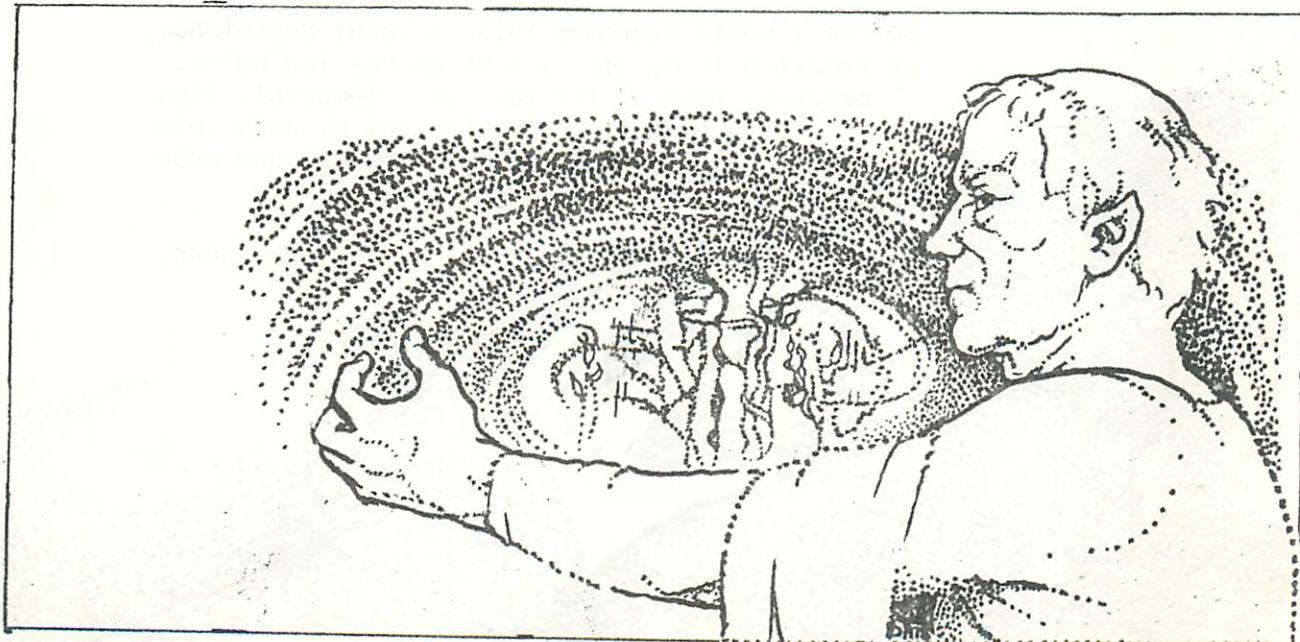
I bowed my head in mute acceptance. Abstractedly, I fingered the glass in my hand. *Shimut-sa'ada* was inexorable. If I acted in a certain way, my death was already an accomplished fact in some future universe. There was one hope. I had three days within which to act, to choose. I could only pray that I would have some sign by which to realize that I had reached the moment of critical decision, the moment when I must choose life for the Empire if not for myself.

"Torandor, I listen and I accept. What do these strange things that have been happening to me mean? And how is the matter of *my* life or death bound to the life or death of the Empire?"

The High Priest did not answer immediately. He set his glass down beside him. Putting his left hand beneath my chin, he raised my head. Looking at me intently all the while, he held his right hand out in the Vulcan manner of greeting, first and second fingers forming a 'V' with the third and fourth while the thumb is held close to the palm.

Hesitantly I responded with the same gesture. Our hands touched momentarily, familiarly. As though Torandor's touch had become fire, I pulled my hand away. This did not deter Torandor. Still trapping my eyes with his own, he began to read the planes and contours of my face with the tips of the first two fingers of his right hand.

The delicate tracing movement awoke memories instantly. The very cells of my body knew such a touch. Involuntarily, I closed my eyes... and was back onboard the *Berserker*. It was six years ago, and she was the proudest flag-ship in the Romulan fleet - and I was an arrogant young Commander supremely confidant



of my ability to handle any situation... any...

His dark, slender fingers winged across my brow, traced the upswept curve of my ear, knew the shadows of my cheekline, memorized the hollow of my neck. I felt strange, oddly light-headed, thoughts disjointed. My body memorized the path his fingers took. Each nerve ending caught fire from his touch. Each cell engulfed his memory.

"It's hard to believe that I could be so stirred by the touch of an alien hand."

(Always and never, touching and touched...)

"I, too, must confess that I am moved - emotionally. I know it is illogical, but..."

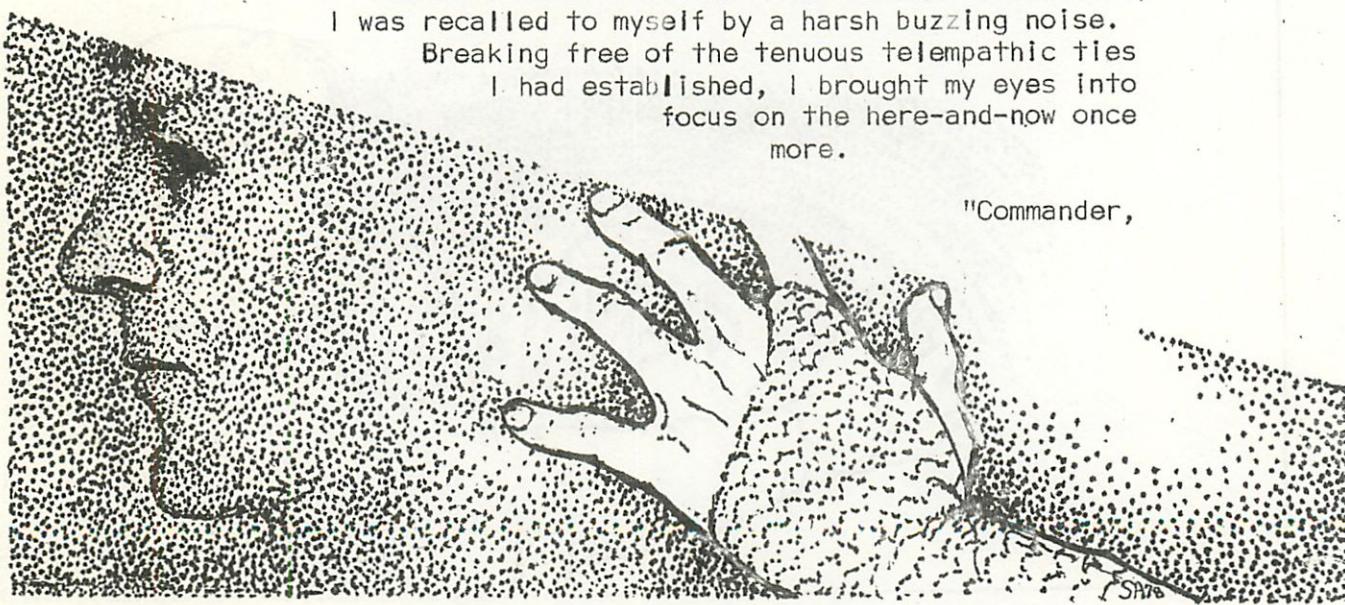
Wanting to share this unexpectedly meaningful experience in every way with him, I projected my mind into his. He was not yet so enrapt as I in the glory of new sensation, but he would be, even he, the logical one, the Vulcan.

"We need not question what we truly feel. Accept what is happening between us, even as I do." I could read his bewilderment, sense his heightened response. Our breathing caught tempo, became matched. The tatoo beat of his pulse grew more pronounced, keeping time with my own. A small, remembered spark of fire coursed through his veins, was swept into my bloodstream to set a brighter flame. We stood on the threshold of a strange new voyage, but still his mind eluded my ultimate finality.

Before I could overcome this residual resistance, I was recalled to myself by a harsh buzzing noise.

Breaking free of the tenuous telepathic ties I had established, I brought my eyes into focus on the here-and-now once more.

"Commander,



SP78

permission to enter!" Tal's voice.

"Not now!" I did not want to lose the glory of this moment.

"It is urgent, Commander!"

The Vulcan had regained emotional control, and was himself again. He indicated that I should allow Tal to enter. Subduing the partially awakened woman in the soldier once more, I bade the Vulcan wait in my inner rooms until I could be free of Tal's matter of "urgency."

I then admitted my SubCommander - and came to learn the bitter taste of betrayal, and defeat.

(Parted from me yet never parted, I await you in the appointed place.)

"Lareesha," Torandor's voice once again brought me back to the present. "Why did you not allow me to work through this moment with you six years ago? So very much of the present is contained within the memory of that past."

I eyed the High Priest in bewilderment. "But what - It was only a very brief moment, a moment which did not even reach fruition. How could it have any meaning other than a private one? True, it adds to the guilt I have felt for the past six years. It is, after all, possible that I subconsciously willed the Vulcan to escape and was myself caught in the undertow of the currents raised by that touch. But of what other importance is that incident?"

Torandor frowned in thought. "Lareesha, we have never discussed the matter, but surely you are aware that your psychic abilities are remarkable for one not initiated into the rites of the Temple. Indeed, at one time I considered you a candidate for the priesthood, perhaps even to be my successor. That you were *not* chosen as a priest-candidate was for one reason only - continued testing and monitoring showed your ego-strength, your sense of self, to be too strong, too overpowering for the priestly role. You are a born leader, Lareesha, not a healer, not a listener."

I listened now, trying to find the meaning behind Torandor's words. If my sense of self were indeed that strong, whence had come the strange sensations I had recently experienced? The sensations which had driven me to seek Torandor's help? And what had the abilities of which he spoke to do with my shameful memories of a past best forgotten?

The High Priest continued. "Though untrained in the finer details of the Mind Touch, you have power and strength behind your use of the basic mental skills. You have at your disposal perhaps even more strength and power than he, the Vulcan, Spock. Unknowingly, you drew on those powers when you chose to play-act the role of seductress at the precise interval when your needs and desires, and those of the Vulcan, could meet and meld. We are a long-lived race, Lareesha, and despite all external appearances you were only then facing imminent adulthood. The cycle-of-life-within had almost completed itself, and you

were on the brink of discovering new joys and strengths, those of womanhood. This lent a force and credence to your play-acting you could not have foreseen. You acted out the truth."

I made a small movement of impatience, but whether for Torandor's reciting of basic biological information or for my own refusal for so long to realize the truth behind his words, I did not know. Torandor stilled me with a small, comforting touch to my shoulder.

He brushed a stray tendril of hair back from my cheek. He then continued. "Whenever there is an intense, emotive telepathic exchange, some small shard of the Other remains behind. The telemetric readings you inadvertently took of Spock are unsurpassed. Based on those readings alone, I could quite possibly build a complete personality construct of him, or even perform an engram implant from memory."

The High Priest brushed aside such possibilities, though fascinating, as irrelevant and went on. "The important thing to bear in mind is that, at the very moment of your impetuous Mind Touch, Spock was in a highly susceptible state. The facts can be reconstructed from the personality residue in your mind." Torandor's voice took on the slightly sing-song quality of one recounting an epic tale.

"A year before your meeting with him, there had been a disastrous failure of Spock's first attempt to consummate adulthood in a sexual context. Bonding had been incomplete, and she-who-was-to-be-his-wife resisted the decree of marriage, issuing a challenge to Spock."

"She chose Spock's captain to play the role of champion - a deadly role. Battle resulted, and in the shock of thinking he had killed Captain Kirk, the *pon farr*, the drive to mate, was sublimated and seemingly lost. But it was there, under the surface, a factor to be dealt with."

Torandor paused. Picking up his crystal goblet, he rose from the bench. He paced about as he strove to recall the Essence of the one whom he had touched so briefly in my mind. I listened as carefully as though the information he was giving me was all new to me. And, in essence, it was. I had been so torn by conflicting emotions after my disastrous encounter with the Vulcan that I had never sensed that Mind Touch, I had never made it a part of my own experience. Rather, I had encapsulated all impressions, all feelings, all data. That moment of brief glory had lay dormant, undigested, undisturbed. Until now, when the High Priest somehow laid great importance to it.

"Shortly after the unsatisfactory conclusion of this mating ritual, it became necessary to house the essence of Spock within the body of an Earth-woman, an Earth-woman who loved him. Although they did not Touch Minds, they did share consciousness. Spock became aware of the realities of love as known to those not dedicated to the 'sterility of logic.'" In spite of my familiarity with esper abilities, it felt strange having my own words quoted back to me by one who had not been physically present when the words were said. It gave added credence to the High Priest's theory.

"Later in that same eventful year, the Vulcan was accidentally transported to a time millennia in the past." Torandor looked over at me meaningfully. "To

a time before the Reforms, before the Great Migration. He began to revert to the martial, barbaric nature of the Before Time - and he enjoyed it!"

Torandor gave a short bark of laughter. Holding aloft his glass in a sincere salute, he said, "What a glorious Romulan he'd be!!" He contemplated the thought happily for several seconds, then continued.

"Several other incidents occurred throughout this year to disturb Spock's logical balance. We need not go into them now in detail, you can *see* them at your convenience. It is necessary only to remember that the cumulative effect on Spock was overwhelming. Outwardly as calm and serene as ever, he was inwardly torn and vulnerable. Add to this the situation and the circumstances under which you met. Vulcans can lie, but to use them for espionage work is to try them to the breaking point!"

Torandor looked at me steadily. "And while he was most vulnerable, you entered Mind Touch with him. Remember, Lareesha, that you yourself had not yet reached fully functional adulthood. However, physical maturity was imminent. Indeed, your thoughts and actions were even then being subtly colored, swayed, influenced by the slowly awakening hormonal imbalances in your body. Remember, too, that although he may deprecate the extent of his psychic abilities, Spock is, in actuality, a formidable esper."

The High Priest again seated himself, and once more set his glass, now empty, on the bench next to him. He took my free hand in both of his own. He glanced thoughtfully down at the hand he held, then looked into my face once more. "Lareesha, when you chose to enter Spock's mind with Mind Touch, you created a bonding situation - and bonding *did* occur. A bonding such as has not been seen since the Before Time; a bonding which, despite years and distances, is still in effect. A bonding so strong it may topple the Empire - or may save it."

Concern was etched on Torandor's face, buried into his voice. "Now do you understand, Lareesha?"

I could only flex my free hand in silent assent. It was hard to believe the strange thoughts and feelings, the hallucinatory images haunting me, were the result of a mere touching of the hand. Yet I could no longer hide the truth from myself. Bonding had indeed been effective. My increasingly bizarre thoughts and imagery, my perceptual synesthesia, my strange actions: all were understandable in the light of the information Torandor had recovered from the hidden passages of my mind. The Vulcan was again in *pon farr*, and over a distance of one thousand light years, I was being called to him: to meet him, to mate him, at "the appointed place."

I looked at Torandor questioningly. "Is this always the effect of bonding? This strange loss of self?" I could not believe that rational, "logical" beings would accept such sensory disorientation at such a crucial point in their lives.

"This bonding is, indeed, unusual, Lareesha. Bonding ties are usually stronger than they were with his first bonds-mate, but even so, the female is not normally tied to the inevitability of the *pon farr* drive in quite the same manner as the Vulcan male. The male will die if the *pon farr* is not consummated; the female is free of the death madness. But, Lareesha, you have entered the

pon farr along with Spock. If the mating drive remains unconsummated, Spock will die, it is true. But you, also, will die."

"I do, indeed, have a choice, Torandor. I can die in the madness of the *pon farr*, or I can betray the Imperator and the Praetor, forget that I am a Romulan warrior, and flee to the Federation. And all of this because of a hunger I knew not, a disease caught unawares. If I fly the Empire, Torandor, I will be alive. But at what cost? I cannot accept life at the cost of honor." I smiled ruefully, ironically. "He did not."

Torandor said simply, "Then you die."

"Is that not as it should be? If I run like a sniveling traitor simply because I fear my own death, how can that aid the Empire? Is this not the choice you have foreseen for me? The choice which will lead to death for self or for the Empire?"

"I do not know, Lareesha," Torandor answered. The choice you must make may be even more difficult than to die for the Empire. What if you must choose to live? to go to the Vulcan? What if the Empire can continue only through your continued existence?"

I looked at Torandor in shock. I could not conceive of a world in which service to the Empire could depend on fleeing to her enemy. I wanted to question him. Just then, however, from the hills outside town, came the sound of distant thunder.

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CHAPTER FOUR: Thunder sounded again, closer this time. Belatedly, I realized the anomaly, the meteorological impossibility of such a sound. Yet the only other explanation for such a sound I completely rejected. I turned to the High Priest perplexedly. "Torandor, what...?"

Torandor's entire body had assumed a listening position. Head thrown back, he was scanning the arc of sky visible through the transparent dome. The sky was cloudless. The sun, now directly overhead, shone even more brightly than before. I did not interrupt the High Priest's intense concentration. After the space of many heartbeats, he turned to face me. His first words, however, were a surprise. They did not appear to relate to any of the events of recent or present experience.

"Lareesha," he asked, "are you acquainted with the theories of history developed by Kerac Antonius and Torquai Laius?"

"Of course," I responded somewhat impatiently, unable to determine the purpose behind Torandor's question. "Both historians are required reading at the Collegium."

The theories of these two historians represented two of the major schools of thought pertaining to the growth and development of cultures and societies. Kerac had developed the concept of the "Star Shaker," that individual who,

through talent, birth, or circumstance, sweeps all before him to alter the whole course of history. Marcus Dillex of Romulus, Surak of Vulcan, Alexander Macedonia of Terra: all were leaders who, solely by reason of their existence, had drastically changed the shape of the future.

Torqual Laius, however, had seen the nature of change as lying within the fabric of society itself. He felt that even the birth of leaders, of heroes, was due to the social evolutionary process. He developed the theory of the *siantha*, the world cycle. Some of Torqual's followers had even hypothesized the existence of a world mind, a group consciousness functioning as an over-being to determine the course of history. Torqual theorized that historic events were inevitable, occurring in their own time as determined by the cycle of history. According to this theory, leaders were called forth by the *ka-siantha*, the spirit of the cycle, as they were needed.

Academicians argued these theories ceaselessly. But what did such scholarly questions have to do with my present situation?

Torandor said only, "Lareesha, remember, Kerac and Torqual may have each seen only one facet of the truth. A synthesis of both ideas, both theories, may be a closer approximation of reality. History may indeed be cyclic, following the dictates of the *siantha*. And the presence we both sensed in your mind may be an actualization of the *ka-siantha*. But this, too, is true - that leaders, by their very nature, have the option of free choice. They may choose *not* to lead. Is the cycle then broken?"

I was convinced that Torandor's statements, digressive though they seemed, had a definite purpose. Before I could respond to his last question, however, there was another thunderous roar and the ground suddenly swelled and buckled beneath us. Torandor was thrown forward, and I lunged upward from my sitting position in a vain attempt to catch him. We both fell heavily to the ground. As I fell, I swept the now empty glasses to the ground with me. One of them broke, and I cut myself in several places when I fell.

Thunder sounded again, but this time I could identify it as the roar of an exploding impact missile. Ignoring my cuts, I struggled to my feet. "Torandor! Romulus is under attack. In my disbelief I stated the obvious. I held out my hands to the High Priest, assisting him as he struggled erect. "What could have happened? I heard no attack alert. I must get back to the *Khatera*!" I turned to go, eager to return to my ship, to forget the past few hours in immediate action.

Torandor gripped my arm. "Lareesha, wait. This attack was foreseen. The end of Empire has begun. From this moment on, the actions you take, the choices you make, will determine your future, and that of the Romulan people."

"Torandor, I cannot stand about, weighing every move over and over. Somehow, the Federates must have broken through our outer defensive shell. We are under attack. This is the time for action, not for soul- and deed-deadening caution."

"I agree that action, swift action on your part, is needed. But, Lareesha, to go blindly forth to do battle with an unknown, unseen enemy is scarcely the act of a trained warrior. You must first sound out the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy. As a seasoned campaigner, you know this."

"What is this talk of sounding out the enemy? The Federation has attacked; now we must drive them from our domain and counter-attack." I gave a harsh laugh. "Indeed, this enemy action may be the saving of me yet. If the Vulcan was able to sublimate the *pon farr* drive in the throes of remorse for the supposed death of his captain, perhaps I can burn the mating compulsion out of myself in the heat of battle. There is very little that can stand before the flame of a Dallividia in a berserker rage, Torandor."

Again the ground rocked under the impact of an exploding missile. Too disturbed to observe proper protocol, I shook off Torandor's arm. "Excellency, your pardon, but I must rejoin my ship."

Torandor gave me a measuring look, then sketched a blessing on the air between us. "So be it," he said. He turned to lead me back to his offices. "Lareesha, attend." I followed him into the interior of the Temple once more.

"Torandor, I regret leaving this abruptly. But I must get back to my ship. I cannot stand idly by while an attack is in progress."

"I understand, Lareesha. You are, above all else, SubCommander of the *Khatera*." An errant memory, freed by my recent mental turmoil, returned, brought to consciousness by Torandor's choice of phrase... myself in disbelief asking "Who are you, that you can do this to me?" A fleeting look of regret, sadness, surely of emotion on a stoic Vulcan face, then... "I am First Officer of the *Enterprise*." Such memories were dangerous, and I ruthlessly repressed it again.

I gave Torandor grateful acceptance for his understanding, and started to bow in formal leave-taking. Saying, "One minute, Lareesha," the High Priest crossed over to an ornately carved *tilmarla* cabinet on the wall farthest from the garden entry point. He opened the doors, revealing a computerized safe of *obsidiumor*, the hardest material known to us. Torandor pressed a sequential series of buttons on the face of the safe. The safe door automatically opened to the proper code. Torandor reached into the safe and drew out a small pouch made of *aldaran* leather. The pouch had self draw-strings, and was attached to a golden chain from which it dangled like an amulet. The High Priest hefted the pouch thoughtfully in his right hand, then made a decisive gesture of acquiescence. "Lareesha," he held the pouch out to me, "for protection."

I accepted the amulet from the High Priest. It was slightly heavier than its size would appear to warrant. I started to open the leathern pouch, but Torandor laid his hand over mine. "Do not ask me to explain, but I do not want you to examine the contents of this pouch at just this minute. Honor this request, Lareesha."

Obediently, I drew tight the strings of the pouch once more. The High Priest and I left the office together. Hador was still on guard duty. Motioning me to stay where I was, the High Priest went over to the young guardsman. In a voice pitched too low for my ears, Torandor gave him an order. Hador looked surprised, and gestured toward his duty station. I assumed the order in some way entailed his leaving his post. This proved correct. The High Priest remained firm in his order, and Hador saluted smartly and briskly moved off.

Torandor rejoined me, and we strode quickly down the long North Wing corridor. As we entered the huge entry hall, we could see it was now the scene of

much frenetic activity. Military personnel who had been in the Temple were now pressing forward to rejoin their ships or to head for the nearest despatch center for re-routing. All were as eager as I to join the battle brought so treacherously to our home planet.

Torandor and I left the cool dimness of the Temple. The heat and the brilliant white glare of the summer sun at Nardath-time are phenomenal, even by our standards. Despite the discomfort, however, we walked hurriedly to the ornithocopter station. My rank and Torandor's presence would assure for me the next available vehicle.

An ornithocopter arrived just as we got to the station. I strode to the head of the line. Any faint grumbling that arose in spite of my rank faded when Torandor was noticed. Automatic relays opened the door of the air vehicle and lowered the landing stairs. I entered the ornithocopter, then turned to say good-by once more to Torandor. The High Priest bade me farewell in the formal manner, and traced the Pilgrim's Blessing on the air between us. He then said, "Remember, Lareesha, the greatest cycle of all is called *cytherea*."

Puzzled, I started to question him about his words and his blessing. My question was cut off when the landing stairs were quickly drawn up and the door of the vehicle closed. The ornithocopter rose noiselessly into the air. Turning to viewscreen, I set the controls for the Temple and watched as Torandor re-entered the building.

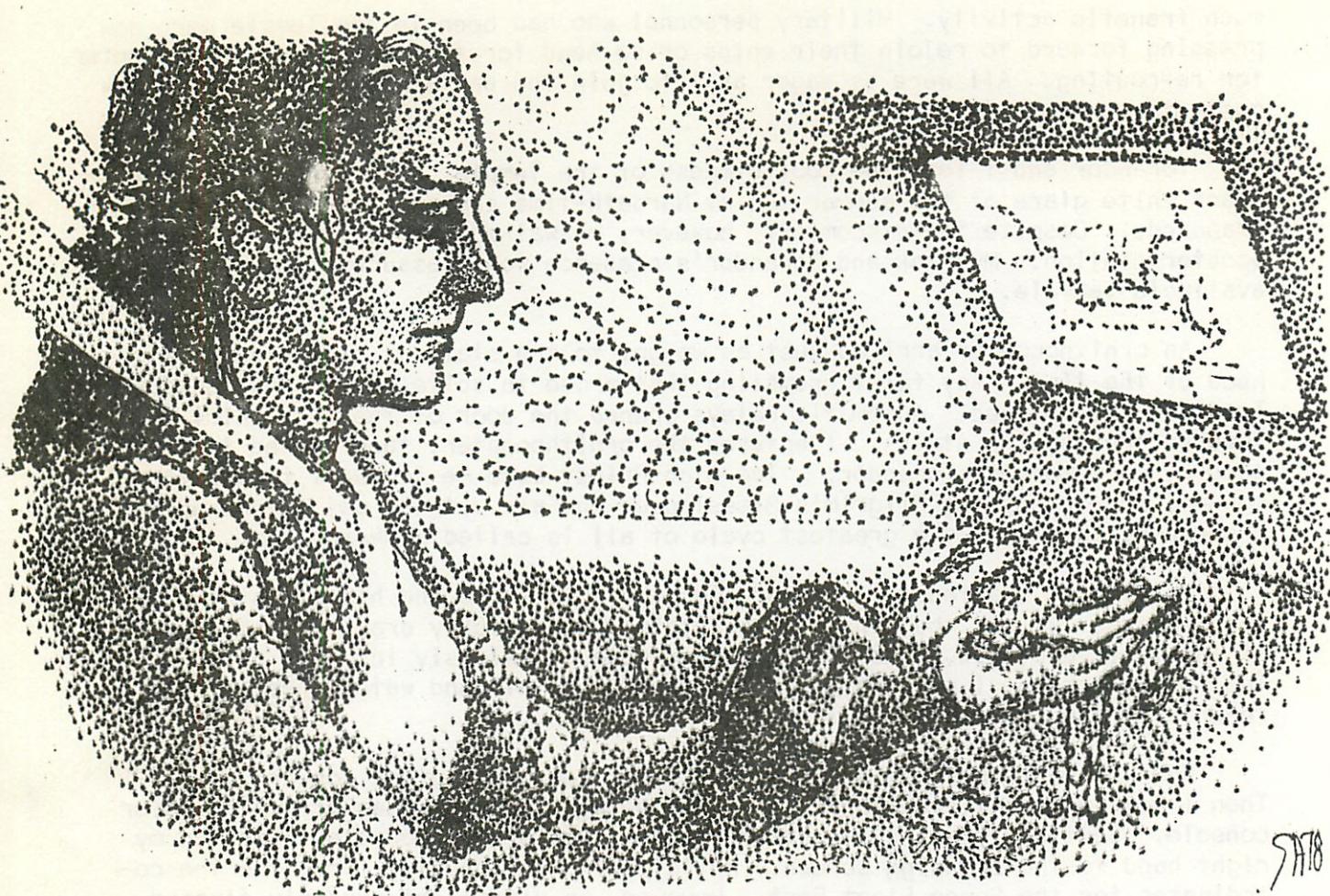
When he was gone from sight, I set the screen on routine forward view. Then I held my identification tag up to the televiewing screen of the computer console. Setting Torandor's leather pouch on top of the console, I pressed my right hand to the scanning screen. Anticipating no trouble, I recited the coordinates for the Space Fleet Port. However, an ultralight suddenly flashed, and the toneless voice of the computerized auto-pilot recited, "Emergency over-ride, emergency over-ride. Code 2091: Darius. In the matter of Lareesha, Sub-Commander, RISC Khatera. When located, bring immediately to the Old Palace by order of Tuarek, ProConsul."

I could not understand why the ProConsul would want to see me again, particularly in the midst of such an emergency situation. However, there was no way I could countermand the orders he had given Central Computer, so I had no choice but to sit back for the short return trip to the Palace.

At that point, the amulet I had set aside caught my eye. My curiosity again aroused, I leaned over and picked it up from the console. I opened the leather pouch and spilled its contents into my cupped hand.

I unncititated and opened my eyes wide in disbelief. There, glowing with its own prisms radiance, lay the *Reeshandra mhi Vardaa*, the Silver Star of Vardaa, most prized possession of the Temple.

Its beauty was beyond compare. The size of a *folda* egg, the many-faceted stone lay sparkling in my hand. A crystal clear jewel, it refracted light like any prism, yet seemed to multiply, to intensify the light it treated in such a manner. It glinted more beautifully than Spican fire-stones, Terman diamonds, or *kleron* gems. Its heart was a time-frozen flame, and the crystal was soothingly warm to the touch. Strangely, it exuded the faint, spicy fragrance of *djalabe*.



5A18

Were these its only attributes, the Reeshandra would be priceless. But its infinite worth was not simply for its beauty, great though that might be. The Silver Star of Vardaa was a stone of power used since the before time as both focus and amplifier for the priestly adepts of the Temple. The High Priest was the guardian of the Silver Star of Vardaa. Why had he passed the focus stone on to me?

I do not know if it was the stone in my hand amplifying my psionic abilities, but as soon as I began to question Torandor's action I was aware of a sudden sense of forboding. I set the televiewing screen for the co-ordinates of the Temple once more. A split second of unfocused visual static, then the screen cleared. I could see the huge, imposing edifice in sharp detail. And even as I watched there was a sudden barrage of missiles. I quickly switched the viewing screen to an upward scan, but to no avail. I had insufficient power to sight the attacker. I switched back to the Temple.

The Temple, sacrosanct through all the years prior to the Unification, had never been shielded. Since no Romulan could even conceive of such blasphemy as to attack it, major shielding had never been necessary. The unprotected Temple would not remain standing long under this furious attack.

I could feel each missile hit, bore in, explode. The Temple was destroyed before my eyes in a series of fiery explosions. Involuntarily, my hand clutched

more tightly around the stone of power. The stone grew warmer, and I was thrown into sudden rapport with those trapped in the Temple. In one small part of my mind there was a sudden brilliance as I held in my thoughts the very essence of those men. I knew them intimately. They lived for me, with me, in me. I had not the training to endure such a massive overload. My mind shied away from the impact, and there was only the emptiness caused by the violent deaths of hundreds of men, an emptiness impossible to describe to non-telepaths. An emptiness made greater by my realization that, even with the aid of the focus stone I could not sense any life emanations from the High Priest.

Opening my hand, I put the Silver Star back in its leather pouch. I lifted the long golden chain over my head. The pouch hung free, like the amulet I had first assumed it to be. I tucked it inside my uniform, where it lay quietly upon my breast. Silently, but nonetheless binding on my honor, I promised to serve as guardian to the Reeshadra mhi Vardaa to the best of my untutored ability. I had been given a sacred trust, and I would fill it until such time as I received an indication that another should assume the role of Guardian.

My thoughts had been so involved with the Silver Star, I had not even noticed the passage of time. It was with some shock that I heard the voice of the auto-pilot announce atonally, "Your destination, noble passenger."

Automatic relays functioned smoothly once more. The door slid open and the landing ladder telescoped to the ground. I disembarked from the ornithocopter.

In front of me stood the Old Palace, heart of the Romulan Star Empire. Completely engulfing the Palace and several meters of surrounding land was the golden shimmer of a full-strength force-field. For practical reasons, the ornithocopter station and the sentry gates were outside the screen. I cast a look around. The Palace was not yet under attack, but the roar of the enemy's missiles was drawing closer. I hurried across the open ground from the landing station to the sentry gate.

I stepped through the gate. Immediately, I was caught and held in a stasis beam while automated sensors and screening devices sprang to life. A slight tingling sensation spread throughout my entire body. I was being analyzed from my skin, down to my last drop of green blood. A faint mental discomfort told me that a psychic probe unit was being used. A growing warmth, felt even through the covering leather pouch, radiated from the stone lying on my breast.

The probe had awakened its powers. As a child, I had often been entertained by Torandor's tales of our history and heritage. I knew that, on the rare occasions when guardianship of the Silver Star passed from the High Priest, the most complete secrecy was maintained as to its whereabouts. I assumed, therefore, that the focus stone was building and maintaining a false set of memories for the psychic probe - memories which would not include guardianship of itself.

The mental and psychic probes were thorough and painstaking - as to be expected under battle conditions. One spy, one smuggled bomb, could wreak untold havoc if allowed anywhere within the Old Palace.

The examination took a long time. With my inner senses heightened by the activated focus stone, I sensed that four disruptors were trained on my motionless body. I wondered if the bonding ties which had been forged between the Vul-

can and myself had, in some way, created a situation that the psychic probe would read as a danger to the Empire. Even as this thought was formed, I felt a warning touch of heat from the focus stone. Obedient to its message, I tried to clear my mind.

I sensed that, with the current emergency situation, I would not have easily passed this inspection without possession of the Reeshandra. A vagrant thought appeared, a wonder if even the focus stone offered enough protection against the sentry probes, the most powerful psychic tools we had available. I quickly suppressed this thought, as well as the next, wonderment as to what the Praetor would do if informed that his daughter had been summarily executed as a danger to the Empire.

As suddenly as it had begun, the mental discomfort ceased. At the same time, my body was released from the stasis field which had held it motionless. I staggered slightly as muscles and bone again had to take up the work of fighting gravity. A voice - sexless, disciplined - came to me over the communications system.

"SubCommander, you have been identified and given Alpha Prime clearance. Enter, please. You are to report to ProConsul Tuarek in the War Room. Follow attack status Prime Alpha directives.

Prime Alpha directives? The situation was indeed tense. I hurried to the force-field still blocking my way. Raising my arm, I placed my identification tag directly against the screen and repeated, slowly and precisely, the coded sequence needed for entry.

There was a sudden, sickening wrench as my body was riven asunder, every molecule shunted into its own hyper-universe and spread across all of space and time. Consciousness remained, yet awareness could not grasp the reality of the situation. My silent scream echoed throughout all of existence.

A second more of such sensations, completely untranslatable into understandable idiom, and then I was through the field. It took me a minute longer to collect myself. Recovering my mental equilibrium, I headed across the open courtyard to the palace. At that very moment the battle reached me. I looked upward. The sight was unforgettable, as armed warheads exploded, seemingly against nothing. The energy impact travelled down the force field screens and was dissipated into the ground... but each such dissipation drained off a bit of the screen's own energy.

I had not realized Federate gunners were such precise marksmen. Indeed, their marksmanship was uncanny, almost diabolically inspired. With their first fusillade over the Palace they had scored a direct hit. True, their missiles had destroyed themselves against our force-field, but vital energy had been drained, and it augered ill for that time when, inevitably, the screen would finally fall.

I tore my eyes away from the fiery display and hastened toward the Palace. As I reached the mighty quarried-stone steps, the ground broke open beneath my feet. An impact missile, exploding on contact with the planet's surface just outside the force-field, had hit a geophysical fault in the underlying sub-strata and had set off a minor planetquake. I was pitched forward heavily, and had the wind shaken out of me. I shook my head to dispel any lingering after-effects of

the fall, and started to pick myself up.

"SubCommander, are you hurt?" A young recruit on guard duty, plasma rifle at ready, started down the steps toward me. I waved him back as I got unsteadily to my feet.

"I'm fine, Recruit. Just somewhat shaken."

The youngster continued downward. When he reached me he shifted the rifle a fraction so that it subtly pointed in my direction. May I see your Identification, SubCommander?" his order was couched as a polite request. I handed my identification over, making a mental note to congratulate Tuarek on the combat readiness of his Palace Guard.

With a smooth, practised, one-handed gesture the recruit accepted my identification and thumbed on the miniaturized communications devise attached to his uniform collar. He called for a clear channel to Computer Central, and was immediately acknowledged and connected.

He read out my identification co-ordinates, then handed the tag back to me. From a holster attached to his tunic belt, he drew forth an omniscanner. I admired his thoroughness, but - particularly in light of the total examination I had received at the sentry gate - grew rather impatient. I proceeded to tell him so.

The young guardsman waited for me to finish, politely replied "Yes, SubCommander," and continued his job. Yes, I would definitely congratulate the Praefor on his guard! The young soldier kept me under subtle cover from his weapon while he trained the omniscanner up and down my body. The channel to Computer Central was still open, and he ordered, "Computer, lock on." A metallic "Working," response and several seconds of silence.

During this scan, the focus stone sprang to life again. I raised mental brows. My father was taking no chances. The guardsman was equipped with an ultrascanner having both physical and psychic probes.

Static, then the voice of the computer programmer came over the open communications channel. "Identification confirmed: Lareessha, SubCommander, RISC Khatera, When located to report directly to the War Room by order of Tuarek, ProConsul and Praefor."

The recruit nodded as he received this information, then returned the omniscanner to his belt pouch. His phaser rifle was still held at readiness, but I was no longer in his line of fire. Saluting sharply, he stood aside for me. I returned his salute and again started up the stairs.

The enemy fire increased in fierceness. An ominous rumbling sounded as a barrage of missiles was unerringly set down in attack pattern around the fault already exposed.

I heard a warning shout behind me from the recruit. Simultaneously, the focus stone at my breast grew painfully hot. An unfamiliar sound, a harsh grating, breaking, grinding noise hurt my ears. I quickly looked upward. The entire face of the building was falling, and I stood directly in its path.



CHAPTER FIVE: I threw myself to one side, out of the path of the oncoming rock-slide of masonry. I twisted about. The recruit had dropped his plasma rifle. In an attempt to get clear of the falling rocks, he turned and jumped down the last few steps to the ground. He misjudged his distance, however, and his ankle twisted under him. He fell to the ground heavily.

I drew on my berserker heritage. Deliberately I set in motion certain hormonal processes which gave me increased powers in time of need. Drawing on these inner resources, I threw myself forward in an attempt to pull him to safety. Even with my enhanced abilities, there was not enough time.

I received a glancing blow on the side of the head, and was swept down the steps by falling rubble. The young guardsman, unable to drag himself from danger, caught the worst of it. Once again my mind experienced the shock, the emptiness of death.

There was nothing I could do for the recruit, but his death deserved some recognition. I pulled myself erect and struggled over the fallen stone-works to the spot from which I had 'heard' his dying thoughts. The recruit's body was completely buried. Even with my still heightened abilities I would be unable to physically clear away the rocks and rubble which hid him from sight.

Could I draw on the Reeshandra mhi Vardaa for the power to clear the rubble from the recruit's body by mental force alone? Undoubtedly I could. However,

the levitation of inanimate objects was not one of my psychic abilities, and I would therefore lose precious time ~~trelling~~ the ability in order to integrate the necessary application of psychic force into my consciousness. Moreover, until new neural pathways could be formed to handle the power fluctuation required by such an ability, each use of it would leave me dangerously weakened mentally and physically - if I were not completely burned out in my first attempt to use this power.

This spot would have to serve for the recruit's burial. If the shields fell, and the Old Palace was razed to the ground under the incessant bombardment of enemy missiles, he would be only the first.

I looked around, but the courtyard was empty. With a full-scale enemy attack in progress, it might be some time before a check was made on the extent of quake damage. Satisfied no-one would see, I drew the pouch from its hiding place. I opened it and spilled the Silver Star into my hand. Kneeling, I set the focus stone over the spot where I sensed the dead recruit's forehead to be. I rose to my feet, stood quietly a moment, then sketched in the air the ritual pattern for the Final Blessing. Then, thankful that I had had a thorough training in orthodoxy, I recited the Prayer for a Slain Comrade-in-Arms. The focus stone flared briefly. I seemed to feel, to sense, a sudden rushing by. For one brief moment - despite the still ongoing fury of battle - I had an incredible sense of peace.

Stooping, I picked up the Silver Star. A hole as big as a *gladya* fruit was eaten into the surface of the rock, where the focus stone had lain. I put the focus stone back into its pouch and once again - not without some trepidation - tucked it inside my uniform. But it was no longer active, and again lay quietly next to my skin.

I turned to enter the Palace. Dislodged masonry and fallen rubble made the job difficult. I had gone only a few steps from the body when I tripped over a large piece of stone-work. I could see a metallic glint under a corner of the fallen masonry. Putting both hands under the loosened chunk of *malzam*, I lifted one edge and saw the slain guards-man's plasma rifle. Breathing deeply and slowly, I transferred most of my still heightened physical strength to one arm. I held the large masonry chunk steady with that arm, and drew the plasma-rifle out with the other. I then dropped the large rock back into place.

Hefting the rifle over my head, I turned to the buried recruit. "I thank you, Brother," I stated sombrely. "I shall use this weapon with honor." I slung the rifle over my shoulder by its woven carry-strap, I turned back to the Palace steps. The fallen facework was a formidable obstacle but I struggled over the stonework and rubble with no further untoward events.

I finally staggered through the main entranceway to the Palace. It was unguarded with the death of the recruit, and could not remain so. I went to the guard post just inside the massive doors leading to the receiving Hall of the Palace. The computerized control board there was as I remembered it from a demonstration Tuarek had given me two tours-of-duty ago. I started to contact Computer Central, then hesitated. At this stage in our defense measures, wasn't a posted guard a superfluous show? I started to turn from the computer console, but realized in time that, even under *these* circumstances, the continuity of the guard tradition had to be maintained - for morale, if for no other reason.

I turned back to the guard post terminal and pressed the button sequence that would tie me into Personnel Deployment. I tersely informed them of the situation. Under the emergency powers granted me by Alpha Prime directives, I ordered a replacement sent to the guard post. I set the guard-post board on automatic pending the arrival of a newly detailed guardsman. I saw no need to wait to see if my orders were carried out; discipline ordained they would be.

I had delayed too long. Tuarek, who did not look kindly on excuses in lieu of action, had ordered me to report to him in the War Room *immediately!* I set out for the subterranean levels of the Palace.

I hurried down a long, narrow passageway. I came to a mechanical lift and hesitated. Did my need for haste outweigh the risk of being trapped if the power failed? It did not. I ignored the lift and took the first flight of stairs I came to.

The Reeshandra began to emit a steady warmth, and I felt a sudden increase of anxiety. I quickened my pace. The drone of enemy fire continued.

The Palace was shaken by another exploding missile. The deflector screens could not take much more. This unrelenting, direct bombardment was causing a steady weakening of power. At each impact the lights grew dimmer as more power was channeled to the screens. I couldn't last. All too soon the screens would be down.

The next explosion was uncomfortably close. I was knocked off my feet and fell, slipping and sliding, down half a flight of stairs. I quickly got to my feet and checked for damages. I was bleeding from more than a dozen minor cuts, my ankle had been twisted when I fell, and my uniform was beyond repair. Moreover, the difficulty I was having in focusing my eyes suggested I might have been more seriously injured by that chunk of masonry than I had thought. I could still function, however, and the plasma rifle I had recovered was operable, so I pressed downward.

The noise of battle could be clearly heard even as I penetrated more deeply into the protected depths of the Old Palace. Through the high-pitched drone of the enemy barrage my trained ears could make out the dull throbbing of our anti-missile banks and air attack defenses. But the enemy fire was deadly and incessant. Too incessant. I could hear no break in the rhythm of attack. Where were our own ships? Why were the warships presently on assigned duty in this quadrant not even now engaging the enemy?

The lights flickered again, dimmed slightly, then regained their prior level. I barely gave them a second glance as I pressed on. I reached the level I wanted and turned off onto a long passageway. Almost immediately I was in front of the Huge War Room door. Since this had been voice-coded for me, I gave name, rank, and identification co-ordinates in the proper order. The door did not open. Computer Central must have been damaged since my last contact with them. I could only hope not so severely as to destroy all our hope of answering the enemy's attack.

Unslinging the plasma rifle from my shoulder, I aimed point-blank at the door and fired. The plasma bolt destroyed the molecular structure of the door,

enabling me to batter a hole through it with the butt of my weapon.

I stepped through. The War Room was deserted save for Tuarek. The ProConsul was standing over a three-dimensional, color-coded model of the city and its environs set up on a large table in the middle of the room. The auxiliary computer hook-up which powered the War Room instrumentation was obviously still functioning. The many consoles throughout the room were operating perfectly, lights flashing, incoming data being recorded, temporary plans of attack being prepared for the Praetor.

I joined Tuarek at the war-map. I could read in its color coded flashes of light the death of this great city, I followed the gridded lines to where the Temple should be. The pin-point of light which had shown its existence was a blackened crystal now. The Council Chamber, the Forum, the Senate: all were dull brown embers on the rim-edge of final destruction. One more direct hit and they would be destroyed, leaving dull, black embers on the similicron board.

The Plains of Ishmahun, outside the city limits, were now a solid field of black. The military complex, the Collegium - destroyed in the very first attack. Throughout the city, the pin-points of light representing sites of strategic or symbolic importance were also showing the effects of bombardment, ranging from a clear white glow to yellow, amber, brown, and black.

I looked up from the similicron board. The ProConsul's eyes met mine. "Such total destruction. Father, how is this possible?"

The ProConsul did not respond to me immediately. He swayed, steadying himself by holding onto the table with his left hand. His right hand, around which he had wrapped his stole, was held tightly to his body. I feared he was seriously injured and started forward. His voice, grown harsh with exertion, stopped me. "The viewer. Check fleet status."

I turned to the huge view-screen behind me. Setting my rifle on a nearby computer cabinet, I bent over the console board of a War Computer outlet. I pressed the Security coded digital series which would bring us a televised print-out of the present condition of every ship in the Romulan fleet. I stood immobilized in shock as ship after ship was listed "destroyed."

I forced myself to move. I faced Tuarek, my eyes reflecting the horror of our losses. "Tuarek, the fleet is decimated. Three-fourths of our forces have been destroyed and another eighteen percent are so critically damaged they are out of service." I paused, rechecked the figures. There was no mistake.

"Enemy fire alone could not have caused such havoc. What... ?" A sudden thought, painful in its implications, sent me whirling back to the viewscreen. I recalibrated for additional information. A slight humming sound, a hundred flashing lights, were proof the War Computer was still operable. Almost, though, I doubted the validity of the information I had received. Such total destruction! How was it possible? An alerting noise sounded, and the new information I'd requested appeared on the screen.

I deciphered the symbols on the screen. The answers I had been hoping for were not there. Indeed, the mystery grew. "ProConsul, every ship of the D-6 Battle Cruiser class has been destroyed: but through self-destruction, and not

by enemy fire. How could such a disaster possibly occur? A new form of space madness?" I paused as additional statistics appeared on the screen, then relayed the new data to Tuarek.

"The self-destruct signal appears to have been automatic and mechanical. In each instance there was a sudden computer order for total destruction-- no warning, no precipitating cause. In some cases the destruct order came even as the ship's SubCommander was in contact with Computer Central on other matters. Tal, the *Berserker*, they were taken completely unawares."

My fingers flew over the console. The Computer retrieved from its vast memory banks the information I had requested. Tal's image filled the screen. He spoke with an unseen operative assigned to Computer Central Headquarters. Their conversation was unimportant, routine. Behind Tal I saw the familiar details of the bridge of the *Berserker*. Suddenly there was a loud explosion, a blinding flash of light. Tal was thrown forward. The panel board caught fire, and the engineering console was torn from its moorings. Another explosion rocked the bridge. The klaxon call of Full Alert Status sounded jarringly. Another explosion, then the screen was blank.

I grieved for the *Berserker*. She was a proud ship, and so treacherous an death was a poor end for her. I grieved also for Tal, for he was a brave warrior who deserved to know the face of his killer, and the reason for his death.

I fed into the computer the programming for a connexion with the *Khatera*. A "Bird of Prey," she has escaped the mass destruction of our fleet. I had left her in standard orbit around the inner satellite, my First-in-Command on the bridge. Knowing my First Centurion, I did not think the *Khatera* was avoiding the conflict, and I needed some first hand information to substantiate, or hopefully to refute, the almost unthinkable conclusion I had reached about the present enemy attack.

The lined face of Centurion First Julia Adona filled the viewscreen.

"SubCommander! We thought you were dead! With the destruction of the 'new fleet' more than half of the ranking officers in the force have been slain. And many of those who were not killed there died on the Plains of Ishmahun when the Military Complex and the Collegium were leveled." Julia's image faded suddenly, and I frantically pushed buttons and levers in an attempt to restore the view of the *Khatera*'s bridge to the screen. Julia reappeared, looking shaken. I could see some debris behind her.

"Julia, are you under attack?"

"SubCommander, we've just been fired on by two Romulan Warbirds. Has the universe gone mad?"

I had been prepared for Julia's words as the only logical conclusion to the entire chain of events. "Mad? No, Julia. Madness isn't necessary when there are traitors and malcontents around. I just hadn't realized how dangerous they were." I was conscious of a growing desire to see the renegades who were attacking my ship. "Centurion, can you link me through to the lead attacking ship?"

"I don't know, SubCommander. They've been keeping a tight beam on all frequencies." Julia turned from the screen and addressed someone out of my line of sight. "SubEngineer, can you feed me enough power to cut through to the bridge of that renegade ship?"

There was no verbal response from the SubEngineer, but Julia's face disappeared. There was a moment's disturbance on the view-screen as lines of force drew abstract patterns on the recording lens. A somewhat blurred, out-of-focus picture gradually replaced the abstract, geometric patterns.

Imperfect though the picture was, it was quite obvious that I was looking at the bridge of a Romulan "Bird of Prey" class cruiser. And it was just as obvious that the unsuspected assault which was almost destroying us was indeed being mounted by renegade Romulans and not, as I had never stopped hoping, by aliens who had somehow managed to capture a cruiser.

A Centurion Third was issuing orders to the renegades. His back was to me, so I couldn't determine his features. However, there was something annoyingly familiar about the cant of his head, the hunch of his shoulders.

The communications link with the rebel ship was reciprocal. One of the crewmen standing near the Centurion Third suddenly started, and gestured excitedly in the direction of the view screen. The traitorous Centurion Third turned slowly to face the screens.

Behind me, I could hear a gasp from the Praetor as the renegade leader's face was revealed. Despite the faulty transmission, the imperfectly focused picture, there could be no mistake. I knew that face almost as I knew my own. I could not be surprised at the identity of the false leader whose visage now filled the screen, arrogance and a lust for power clearly written thereon.

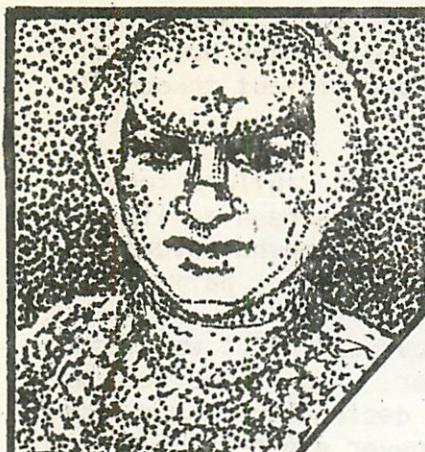
I named the traitor. "Melkor. Cousin."

* * * * *

CHAPTER SIX: My cousin, son of father's father's brother, strode across the bridge of the ship he had commandeered. He stood before the view screen, head thrown back, arms akimbo, wolf smile on his face as he recognized me.

"So, little cousin," he greeted me, "you managed to escape the destruction at Ish mahun? No matter. The palace will be next to go. The Daliividia line will pass to me, today." His eyes narrowed as he brought up a subject I had almost forgotten. "You should not have been so quick to reject my suit, Lareesha. We could have shared my power in the new Empire."

I looked scornfully back at him. "I could not be so careless of name and honor, as to consider weding one such as thee." Deliberately, I used the perjorative familiar in addressing him. I waited the space of a heartbeat to be sure he understood my insult, then added, in a voice as insultingly rude as possible, "Traitor!"



HIS was a handsome face, a strong face, until suffused as now by anger. My words had struck home, and he felt a need to respond to them. I ignored his words, wrapt in my own thoughts: Melkor had, in a single action, destroyed the honor of a thousand generations. Had I ever seriously offered this *commoner* to the ProConsul in my place for perpetuation of the Dallvidia? My father had treated my suggestion with the contempt it deserved.

I viewed the image on the viewscreen in mounting disgust. To think that one of *my* blood had plotted for the destruction and overthrow of the Empire! I hastily switched back to the bridge of the *Khatera*. As soon as Julia Adona appeared I asked, "Centurion, what is your status?"

My First-in-Command answered honestly. "Poor, SubCommander. Our deflector shields are steadily losing power. Two banks of plasma weapons have been put out of commission, and if we make full use of the remaining bank, deflector power will be even more dangerously lessened."

"And engine power?"

"We have both sublight and hyperspace power available, SubCommander. Utilizing either, however, will cause a further drain on the shields."

I switched to the Old Tongue, a dialect going back to the days before the Great Migration. The use of this now obsolete ritualistic language I had inherited as Daughter's Daughter and heiress to my mother, who was of NeRoyal blood in her own right. Julia Adona was Daughter's Daughter also, though of the lesser nobility. She would understand my words. Melkor, if he should succeed in cutting into the channel we were on, would not.

"What ships are attacking you?"

"Registry marks show them to be the *Nawg Ylen* and the *Mederon*."

I flexed my hand in silent assent to a hastily formulated plan. Both the *Mederon* and the *Nawg Ylen* were vessels of the light cruiser "Bird-of-Prey" class and were staffed entirely by Romulans. In all probability, since they were dealing with fellow Romulans at the moment (although what loyal Romulan would admit fellowship with such as *these*?), their translator would be off. If a chance for vengeance were to be mine, I might yet be able to give instructions to Julia Adona before anyone on the attacking ships, if they were listening, would think of switching on a translator. And, since neither the *Mederon* nor the *Nawg Ylen* carried a Daughter's Daughter aboard as a crew-member, I just might succeed in working out a hurried plan with Julia Adona.

"Julia, is the cloaking device still operable?"

"Yes, SubCommander."

"Good. Neither the *Nawg Ylen* nor the *Mederon* have been equipped as yet with our new detectors. With the cloaking device on, you should be safe from discovery. Time your move carefully. At the next hit, let the shield power falter, as though even more dangerously low than it is. When a second barrage is aimed at you, cut shield power and immediately activate the cloaking device. Time yourself very carefully. Feed any power left into the engines. Go forward, between the two ships, at full sub-light speed. Once past the attackers, cut out at arc 3, vector 7. Put the planet between you and the attacking force. Establish an orbit, and cut all engine power.

"We may be able to convince the *Mederon* and the *Nawg Ylen* that they've scored a direct hit on the *Khatera* and destroyed her. With any luck, you'll escape detection by any of the other ships in the renegade fleet. Wait word from me, and avoid contact with all other vessels. If I do not contact you in five hours, take full command of the *Khatera*. Do you understand completely?"

"Yes, SubCommander."

Staying in contact with the *Khatera* would only prolong the dangers of message interception and the possibilities of translator use. I therefore said only "Out, Centurion," when Julia indicated her understanding of my desperate plan. If the plan had any chance of success, Julia would carry it out.

I deactivated the view-screen. Turning to the ProConsul, I briefly explained the steps I had just taken.

The ProConsul flexed assent. "At this point, that may be their only chance, slim though it is." A thoughtful look came over his face, and he paused considerably. Then he continued, but began to discuss a seemingly divergent topic. "I had almost forgotten that you are of NeRoyal rank as your mother's heir. All begins to coalesce."

I looked at him questioningly, unsure of how to interpret his words. He offered no explanation. Seeing my bewilderment, he said only, "I shall explain my words shortly, Lareesha. In the meantime, should we not see if we can do anything else to harry the enemy and delay his triumph?"

The ProConsul faltered on the last word, and a spasm of pain crossed his face. He immediately recovered, however, and waved me back to the view-screen before I could go to his aid. I could sense that he was dangerously weakened, perhaps dying. Nothing else would account for his break in self-control. But discipline, military and familial, held me back from him. He would not thank my efforts should I force myself on him.

The ProConsul turned to the banks of machinery, computers and such, which covered the entire wall behind him. Despite the increasing yellow cast to his skin, the obvious deterioration of his condition, he bent over one of the War Computer's consoles, fingers still flying rapidly as he fed in and extracted vital information.

I could do nothing for him, he would not accept it. In obedience to his wishes I turned back to the televiwer. Perhaps I could provide a dis-

traction which Julia Adona could use to advantage.

Once again I was able to feed into the bridge of the *Mederon*. Melkor was bending over the scanner, intently following the action reflected there.

"Cousin," I spoke to draw his attention.

The traitor who shared my blood looked over to the *Mederon's* view-screen. "Cousin," he returned my greeting, "we have your *Khatera* trapped in a cross-fire. Do you care to watch her death throes?" With mock graciousness he offered to tie my visual contact directly into his own outer screens.

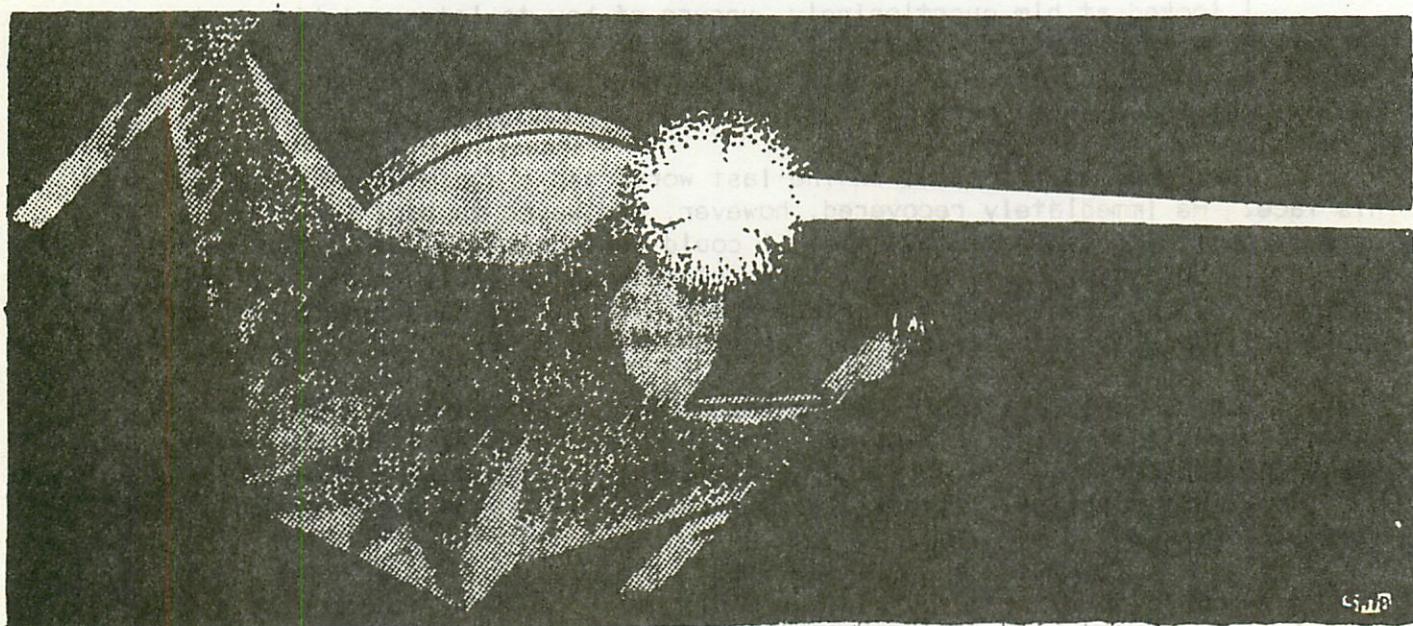
"Do not be so swift to count victory thine, cousin!" I continued to address him in the perjorative familiar. "Success in battle depends on skill, on bravery, on intelligent planning. Thou lackest these qualities. How, then, canst defeat Julia Adona? She is the most experienced Centurion First in the fleet, while thou..."

Deliberately, I allowed my voice to die, contempt acid-etched into every syllable. I could see him growing steadily angrier as I denigrated his ability and skill.

"Experience? Ha! Look how she... how you... how all of you, even your so-worshipped Praetor and his forces were caught unaware. Of what use experience now?"

"Against traitors, betrayers of family and honor, of no use, perhaps. But were this battle not enjoined so treacherously - had honest warfare and not sabotage been the mettle of battle, thou wouldst be imprisoned now - or dead. Traitor."

Visibly, Melkor fought to bring his emotions under control once more. To my surprise, he succeeded. He stared up at his viewing screen, a look almost of regret in his eyes.



"You never even tried to understand, did you, cousin? Remember that I am Dalividia, also. Grant me my own honor, even though it may not be yours. But I ask too much. Neither you nor Tuarek has ever seen fit to grant me recognition." He paused, and the eyes of the image on my view screen met and held mine. "Lareesha, have you still not forgiven me for being alive while Haroc is dead?"

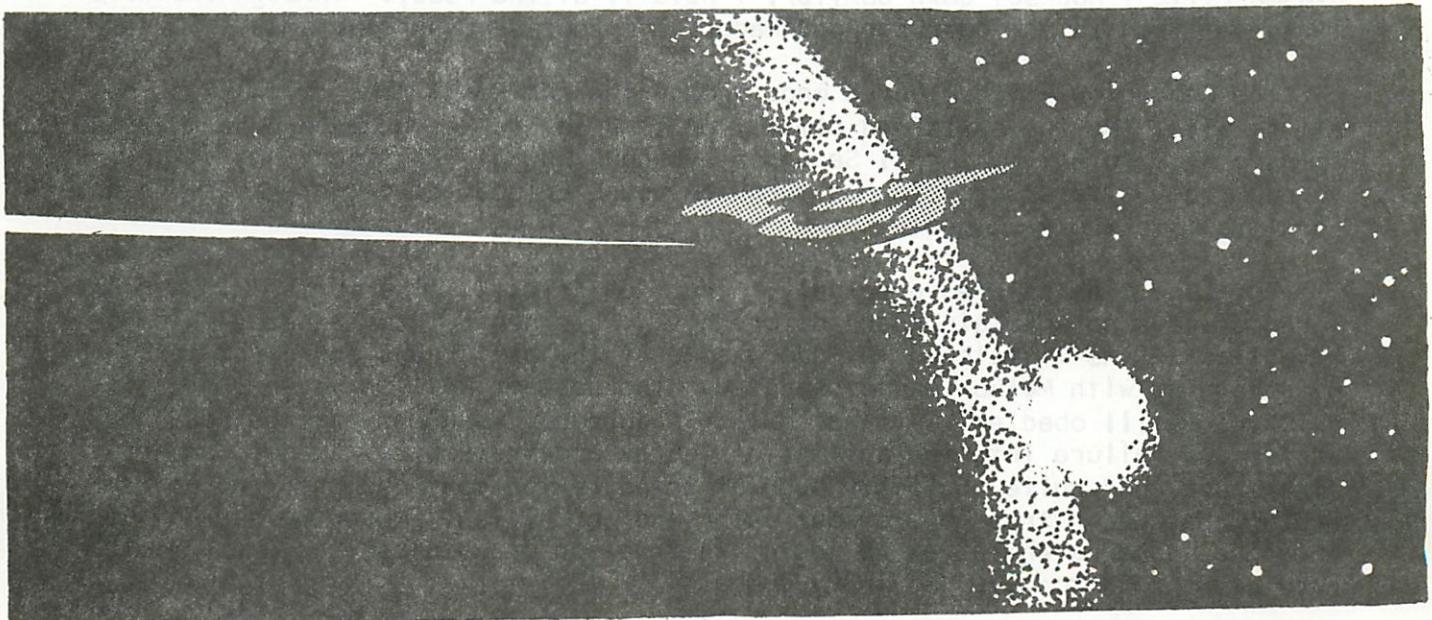
I threw up a hand to ward off his last comment, and concentrated my energy on refuting the first part of his statement. "Honor? Say dishonor, rather, Melkor. The Dalividia serve the Empire, that is the meaning of their honor. You are traitor now to that name."

Melkor's left hand slashed out in a quick, cutting stab of negation. "Traitor? No, it is you who is the traitor, Lareesha. You, the Praetor, the Imperator, and all others too cowardly to carry battle to the Federation. If I must traffic with the Klingons for the power I need to restore glory to the Empire, then I shall do so. It is I who give honor to the Empire, cousin, not you."

One of the crewmen stationed at the scanning panel called excitedly to Melkor "Leader, the *Nawg Ylen* has scored a direct hit! The *Khatera's* shields are down. One more such strike should mark her end. Shall we take the honor of the kill?"

Melkor kept his eyes locked with mine. He raised one brow and made a rueful grimace. "Your command ends here, Lareesha. I know you won't believe me, but I do regret the necessity." He glanced over his shoulder to the crewman who had just spoken. "Fire!"

There was a pause while the *Mederon's* gunners complied with his orders. Out of view of the *Mederon's* screens I switched on a supplementary scanner. The two blips representing the *Mederon* and the *Nawg Ylen* registered quite clearly; the blip which stood for the *Khatera* pulsated weakly. Was this apparent weakness Julia Adona deliberately lowering her screen? Or was the *Kha-*



tera truly suffering from maximal screen damage?

A crewman stationed at the *Mederon*'s scanner cried out at that moment, "Leader, a direct hit! Our instruments show only debris ahead!"

I was momentarily stunned. Debris? Had the *Mederon* indeed scored a direct hit on the *Khatera*? I risked linking my supplementary scanner through to our new tracking system, the one capable of tracking a ship even with the cloaking device engaged.

The *Khatera* was still intact. Even as I watched, Julia Adona put into action the escape plan I had given her. Where then, the debris being tracked by the *Mederon*'s screens? Of course! Julia had added to my original plan. She was attempting to lull the enemy with a phony trail of space debris, supposed evidence of a successful hit. I closed my mind to memories of official papers documenting a time when such a plan had failed in its purpose. The only question was if it would work *this* time?

My glance flew back to the main view-screen. Melkor had turned his attention to the gunnery station, and had failed to note my interest in my scanning equipment. Now he turned back to face me once again.

I had expected gloating triumph, cruel exultation to be visible on his face. Instead, his expression was almost sorrowful as, with gentle irony he said, "You will forgive me if I leave your company, cousin? The battle waits."

Melkor cut transmission. I stared unseeingly at the screen, scarcely daring to believe that the *Khatera* safe. Co-ordinated random fire from the *Mederon* and the *Nawg Ylen* might still cripple or destroy my ship. A simple computer readout on the kind of debris or the mass thereto, and Melkor might yet deduce my plan. I forced my attention back to the scanner. Even as the *Khatera* withdrew from danger, the *Nawg Ylen* and the *Mederon* closed ranks and assumed a new attack position over Old City.

I switched off my televiwer and scanner. I started to turn to the ProConsul, but a noise at the entry door caught my attention. Quickly picking up the plasma rifle I had set down earlier, I held it at the ready. Through the hole I had battered in the door stepped Hador, Torandor's young guardsman.

The Centurion Fifth glanced once around the War Room, eyes quickly taking in all details. Having satisfied himself on some point, he turned and beckoned to someone else to enter. Hrrll Secondus, younger son of the Imperator, stepped through the battered door in his turn. The young Prince following, Hador presented himself to the ProConsul.

"My Lord," he saluted precisely, "The High Priest... the former High Priest Torandor gave me special orders before his... his death in an unprecedented enemy attack." As I listened to Hador, some of the bitterness and doubt left by my encounter with Melkor was dissipated. The best of Romulan youth were still faithful, still obedient. It was Melkor's personal weakness that he read cowardice and failure into the actions of Tuarek and the Empire. Hador, on the other hand, had quite obviously been affected by the death of the High Priest and by the sudden treachery of our 'kin' and our allies. Nevertheless, he would continue to serve while yet he could. A true son of Romulus, and one I would have been proud to have had in my command!

Hador continued. "I was instructed to withdraw the Prince Secondus from his school and report with him to you. I was told you'd have further instructions for me, my Lord."

Tuarek flexed assent. He motioned to the Prince, who obediently stood in front of him. Still keeping his right hand pressed against his side, the ProConsul laid his left hand on the right shoulder of the youngster.

"Imperial Crown Prince Harroll --" I started in disbelief at Tuarek's opening words. The change of name and title were significant. Harroll Secondus was no more. The eight-year-old standing before my father was being called on to assume the role of an adult warrior, and Imperator-designate of the Empire.

Hador stepped to my side. I could sense the tenseness emanating from him. Looking over to him, I could see by the shocked expression on his face that he had reached the same conclusion as I. I looked back to my father and the young - so very young Crown Prince.

Tuarek continued speaking. "My liege. It is my unfortunate duty to advise you of the deaths of your father, the Imperator Trajex of the Romulan Star Empire, and your brother, Hadrian Primus, Crown Prince of the Empire. Are you ready, my fostering, to assume the responsibilities, the burdens, inherent in the title Imperator-designate and Crown Prince of the Romulan Star Empire?"

Harroll gave silent assent, and Tuarek continued. "And are you willing to accept as regent someone of my choice, knowing that I will place always considerations of state above personal preference?"

The new Crown Prince's voice, when he answered Tuarek, was strong and measured despite his youth. "My lord Tuarek, in accordance with our traditions, I have been the foster-son of your house since my birth. No fostering could ask for a more worthy foster-father, no ruler for a more worthy First Noble. I have not been trained to rule. Guide me now."

Tuarek looked steadily at the Crown Prince. "My liege, I promise you. Neither you nor the Empire shall have reason to regret your trust. Go now with Hador. I will send you one in whom you may trust as you trust in me."

Turning to Hador, the ProConsul ordered, "Centurion, take the Crown Prince to the main landing pod. The Praetorian torchship *VinJa Gai* will be within transport range in thirty to forty-five minutes. Be prepared to board her with the Crown Prince. And Centurion," this as Hador turned to comply with his orders, "you are to consider yourself a member of the Praetorian Guard, charged so solely with the protection of the Crown Prince, from this time on."

A proud light in his eyes at this unexpected honor, Hador bowed in formal leave-taking. The young Prince whose life he now guarded then bade farewell to the First Noble of his Empire, the foster-father who had cared for him from birth. The young Prince bore up well under this final farewell, despite his age, he did not give in to emotion. He walked steadily to the door and waved Hador through before stepping through himself. On the other side he turned once, saluted my father and myself, then left to carry out his Praetor's last instructions.

The ProConsul turned to me. Fumblingly, he freed his right hand from his

stole. With his left hand he kept the stole pressed to his side. His right hand he held up to me. I laid the rifle aside, and held up my own right hand. Palm to palm I met the ProConsul in our established tradition.

//Daughter, I die.//

The essence I held in my mind, the gleam of him, the splendor, the hidden depths and sudden brilliant flashes (*a leashed naldjar in feline glory, wisdom and honor as of the Old Ones, an undertone of forest coolness, of brooding oceans such as this desert world has never known*) were indeed fading. Maintaining contact, I looked back steadily at he who had given me life.

"Can you draw on my strength?"

"It is beyond that. Not even that which you carry can effectively restore me. You must assume your role as heir."

I started as he made oblique reference to the *Reeshandra mhi Vardaa*. "How do you know of that?" Surely Torandor had not had time before his death to alert my father to the priceless heritage I now carried! Deep though my respect for Tuarek had always been, I began to realize he was more than even I had known.

"Does it matter how I know of the Silver Star? (*the taste of wryness*) Let us say that dying enhances certain powers. And I do die, my Lareesha. Are you ready to take up the burden you must carry?"

The *Reeshandra*, which had remained quiet in spite of my father's allusion to itself, now grew warm. The moment of which Torandor had spoken had at last arrived. The moment of choice, when I must choose death or life - for self and for Empire.

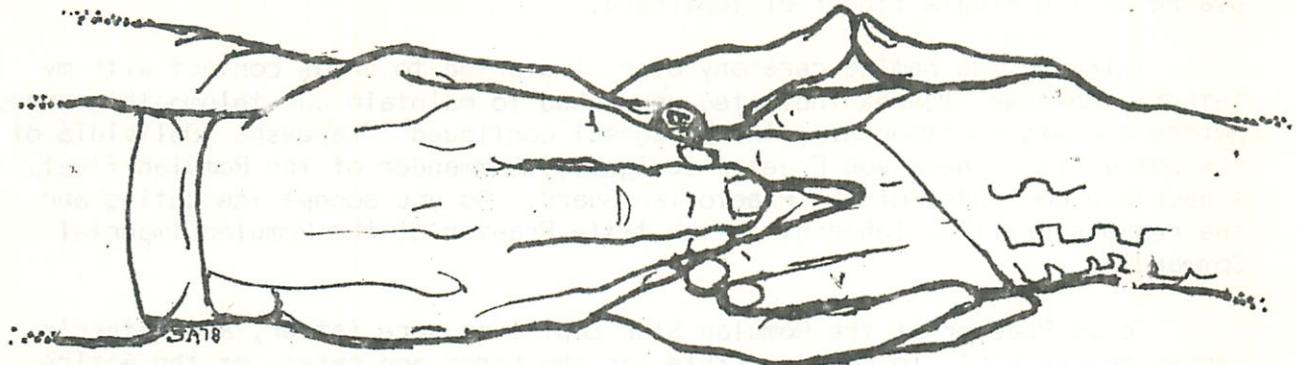
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CHAPTER SEVEN: "What choice have I, my father? So long as I draw breath, my actions must be for the honor of Romulus. *Tsaimat* has suffered enough through the actions of one bearing our name. I shall neither add to our disgrace, nor increase *Tsaimat's* pain."

My father gave assent to my words. (*a sense of purpose, pride in his daughter; determination; an under-image of surging, roaring, white-water rapids*) Still maintaining the physical contact of our telepathic bond, his eyes still on mine, Tuarek ordered "Computer on."

"Recording."

"I, Tuarek, ProConsul, Praetor of the Armed Forces, Quaestor of the People, do hereby enter the following naming ceremony into the Central Records Bank of the main computer at Computer Central Headquarters. I lock this statement into the computers main memory banks by specified voice code.. No future orders, regardless of their origin, may override the statements I make now. I declare this naming ceremony to have full effect of the law, by the powers vested in me as ProConsul, Praetor, Quaestor. Code: Mardith, Zerban, 3498."



"Identification and code confirmed. Attention: contact with Computer Central lost. This recording has priority status for transfer at the earliest opportunity. Recording."

Tuarek showed no surprise that contact with Computer Central had been lost. But the need, the pride, the over-whelming sense of urgency emanating from him grew stronger.

"Lareesha of the Dalividia, blood of my blood, sired of my body, borne by and to L'Ranya, Daughter of the NeRoyal House of Landarr, I name you heir. Do you accept here and now the duties and the responsibilities attached to the title Dalividia of the Dalividia?"

"I accept."

Palm to palm, Tuarek maintained mind-contact with me. Momentarily, he took his left hand away from his side. As this was finally exposed, I could see why he had been keeping his stole pressed tight to his side, why he had been growing steadily weaker. A massive wound, green blood oozing heavily, exposed vital organs dying. Horrified, I started to exhort with my father, hoping to get him to some form of treatment.

"It is too late, daughter. I cannot spare the time. Needs are but transitory compared to what I must do here. (Urgency remained, joined now by a fierce will-to-life, a refusal to die with tasks yet incomplete; a fierce fire burning steadily despite a spreading air of cold darkness; and on the periphery of experience, a repetition of that boding watchfulness first sensed with Torandor)

With his freed left hand, Tuarek had been fumbling in the leather pouch he wore attached to his sword belt. He drew from it a small gold object.

"Daughter, receive from me the signet ring of the Dalividia, symbol of our name, I name you Lareesha, Dalividia of the Dalividia, Lady of the high Meracol, Shaeth of the Randalar, Neodar of the Tridon, Garda of the Compul. The duties and the responsibilities of these titles, along with their lands, rights, and privileges, are assigned to you and your designate heirs unto perpetuity. May the name of the Dalividia be honored and enhanced by your actions."

I responded with the ritual answer. "So shall I, Lareesha and so shall my heirs designate, endeavor always and forever to bring honor and glory to the name of the Dalividia." I closed my left hand over the ring my father had placed on the middle finger of that hand.

Thinking the naming ceremony over, I started to break contact with my father. However, Tuarek indicated he wished to maintain our telepathic bond. Before I could question him, the ProConsul continued, "Lareesha, Dalividia of the Dalividia, I name you Praetor-designate, Commander of the Romulan fleet. I name you Commander of the Praetorian Guard. Do you accept the duties and the responsibilities inherent in the title Praetor of the Romulan Imperial Command?"

To be Praetor of the Romulan Star Empire as were father, and father's father before him! To be responsible for the honor and safety of the entire Empire! To have the power to wage war, or to make peace! Could such honor indeed be mine? My sense of proportion returned after a brief, giddy look into glory.

"Father! My Lord! I cannot accept. Surely there are others..."

My father interrupted my protestations. "Of the few ranking officers remaining loyal to the Empire, and alive after this debacle, you alone will be able to bring Romulus back to true life and glory. Lareesha, believe me. I would spare my daughter the onerous duties of this title, but as Praetor I cannot so spare my most qualified officer. (*desperation and determination strengthened yet more*) Do you accept?"

"I... I accept."

Tuarek closed his eyes and I could feel some of the tension sift out of his body. The sense of urgency remained, but with it was now a growing hope that some plan whose fruition he alone foresaw might indeed come to pass. Slowly, one-handedly, he unpinned the Imperial Crux from his chest. Just as deliberately, he pinned the order to the front of my uniform, reciting the while, "Lady Lareesha, Dalividia of the Dalividia, receive from me the Imperial Crux, Order of Merit, symbol of the office of Praetor. Lady Lareesha, Dalividia of the Dalividia, Praetor-designate of the Romulan forces, supreme Commander of the Romulan fleet, do you vow your life, even unto death, for the honor of Romulus?"

"I so vow."

(*a flash of triumph, a glimpse of his as yet unrecognizable plan*) Then Tuarek's voice was saying, "Hear me, Lareesha, Dalividia of the Dalividia, heir of the NeRoyal family of Landarr. One last duty I give you now. I name you the Lady Lareesha, Regent of Romulus, and place in your care the well-being and the life of Harroll, Crown Prince and Imperator-designate of the Romulan Star Empire. I place this geas upon you, that you will preserve the life of the Imperator-designate, and through him, the Empire. Do you accept this geas?"

I hesitated. This geas, were I to accept it, would become the prime motivating influence of my life. All other considerations - even the need to avenge family honor - would come second. Melkor had betrayed the Empire and

the Dalividia. As Regent, geas-ridden to protect the life of the Imperator-designate, my need to avenge the Dalividian honor by seeking out and forcing a confrontation with Melkor would come second to the need to protect the Crown Prince. Could I so sacrifice my honor for an even higher honor?

I knew Tuarek would not un-name me if I did not accept this geas. As Lareesha, Dalividia of the Dalividia, honored Lady, Praetor and Commander of the Imperial fleet, I would be in a strong position to lead what remained of our once proud forces against the traitors and the false friends who were tasting victory to-day. I could feel the berserker strain within me sparking to life, urging me to action.

But the *Reeshandra*, lying hidden on my breast, was producing a pulsating warmth which counteracted the berserker flame, bidding stop and consider the ProConsul's words carefully. This, then, was the moment of *mladia*, of decision. So much that had been unexplained before was now clear. Deliberately, I broke contact with Tuarek while I marshalled my thoughts.

Torandor had spoken of the cycles of history - and of *cytherea*. In the fullness of time, the cycle of *cytherea* had come again into being. *Cytherea*. That which seems to be is not, that which seems to be not is. Those who had been kin, those who had been called friend, were now proven false. Would sworn foe-men also shift thir position on the cycle of life? Could it be that life and honor - for self and for Romulus - could be found only in exile? Exile to the Federation?

A memory - mine? the Vulcan's? surfaced slowly. A memory of an old, a very old saying, imperfectly remembered, imperfectly understood: *The enemy of my enemy is my friend*. Was it so? With a new enemy had we also gained a new friend? I searched my mind. Was I so bitter against the Vulcan that I would destroy all hope for Romulus rather than take the risk of seeing, meeting, knowing him again?

It was my choice, my decision. For life? for death? And yet, had I a choice, actually? Or had I been maneuvered by Torandor, by Tuarek, by the *kashiantha* itself, into a position where I had but one path leading in front of me?

But no, there were still several paths left open to me. That I would not, *could* not take any of the other roads did not eliminate the element of choice from my decision. And in some other universe, some other Lareesha might, even now, be making another choice entirely.

I held my right hand up to my father once again. I sensed his growing weakness, his increasing weariness. "Lareesha of the Dalividia, do you accept this geas?"

"I accept the geas you lay upon me. I accept the honors and the responsibilities inherent in the title Regent of Romulus."

A sudden release of tension, an end of doubt. My father's inner thoughts echoed his words. //It is good.// The sense of flat, of accomplishment emanating from the Silver Star of Vardaa reinforced these words. "It is good."

Tension lifted suddenly, abruptly, almost audibly. But the mental ties between Torandor and myself did not loosen. Rather, they tightened, deepened,

intensified. I sensed again the moral strength and honor of the man, the justice and the dedication. There, too, were the controlled passions, the hidden depths of warmth. (a shading remac tree, a taste of silyada, a soaring khatera)

And above all, his love for Romulus.

//Daughter, farewell. Tsaimat! Tsaimat! ... //

Sudden coldness, bone-deep, soul-deep. Coldness so intense all feeling, all sensation was cut off. The world telescoped around me, condensing into a single bright spot directly in front of me. My senses were numb, and my mind beat helplessly against its prison of unfeelingness. Even the single bright light I could see, sole contact with the world without, began to fade, and I was

Falling
to a pit of despair
undulating
in eternal
greyness
which seeps
through every pore
of soul and being...

Tearing
at the silken
fetters
en chaining me
as Davish, too,
was bound:
in hopelessness
more strong
than Nardath's power.

I die...

without death's peace.

There was no contact with the Reeshandra. I was completely cut off from existence. I was one with Tuarek. If I were trapped in this close rapport with him at the moment of his death...

//Father!// I cried in silent desperation. //Help me! I can not break away!//

The essence of my father filled my mind once more. By what strength of will he called his soul back from the grey journey on which it had embarked I know not. But I could feel his warmth, his comfort, his presence once more. Images flooded my mind. (the fields of Dalivis, of home, warm and fragrantly red-gold in the Time of Gentle Growing; riding the storms of Mount Calcis in a protected air-bubble, able to dare all because one has safety, has security, has home; and above all, my father - hiding much of

what he was beneath the cloak of a professional soldier, a true son of Tsaimat. Yet to Haroc and myself he had been all.)

With gentle touch and an undertone of humor . . . not lost to him, he severed each telepathic bond that held me a tight-fast prisoner. A last farewell, a gentle pressure, almost a caress, and he was gone.

I was whole, intact, in control of my body once more. Within, there remained only the memory of my father's being. For one brief heartbeat the memory of his passing, the now-too-familiar emptiness of my mind threatened to overwhelm me with grief.

My warrior heritage and training asserted itself. Grief must be held at bay until I could be private with my sorrow. At present, I could not afford the luxury of such an emotion.

I focused once more on the outside world. I could see the outer shell in which Tuarek had been encased begin to fall to the ground. I caught it, and lowered it gently. I had very little time in which to act. The *Vinja Gai* would rendezvous here shortly, and I had still to recall the *Khatera*.

Despite this, I must first pay silent honor, final tribute, to the Praetor.

Once again I drew the golden-chained pouch containing the *Reeshandra* from around my neck. A tenderness where the focus stone had lain on breast warned me of the possibility of a painful burn in the future. I grimaced at this painful evidence that the Silver Star had not been inactive during my too close bout with death - this even though I had been cut off from all contact with the stone.

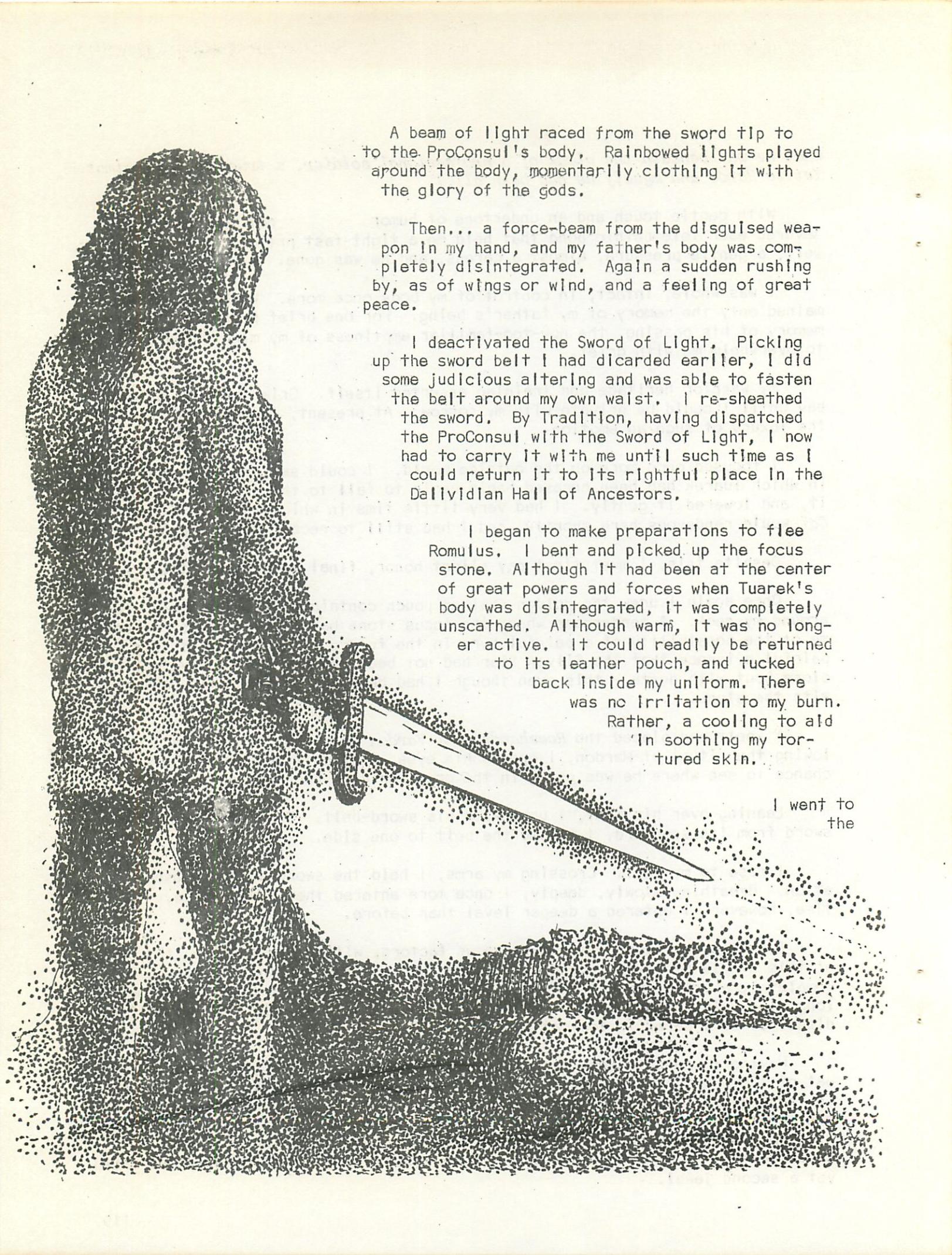
I knelt and placed the *Reeshandra mhi Vardaa* on Tuarek's forehead. Following the ritual of Mardon, I opened his eyes, that he might have a better chance to see where he was going in the grey world he had just entered.

Leaning over his body, I unbuckled his sword-belt. Drawing his ritual sword from its scabbard, I tossed the belt to one side.

I rose to my feet. Crossing my arms, I held the sword as for presentation. Breathing slowly, deeply, I once more entered the *safada* state. This time, however, I entered a deeper level than before.

I emptied my mind of all extraneous factors, willed the tension, the pain, of this single day away. Mind and body worked together as one. I became more completely aware of myself and my place in the universe than I had been for a long time. The burden of self-doubt and guilt I had been carrying for so long dissolved as I dared to look at myself honestly.

Having learned to know myself, I was ready for the next step in this ritual of leave-taking. I came to full attention. Holding the inscribed blade in front of me, I recited the Prayer of Final Battle. I then depressed one of the jewels on the hilt. The tip of the sword began to glow, a softly burnished glowing that slowly grew brighter and brighter, turning at last fiercely incandescent. I pointed the sword at Tuarek's body, and simultaneously depressed yet a second jewel.



A beam of light raced from the sword tip to the ProConsul's body. Rainbowed lights played around the body, momentarily clothing it with the glory of the gods.

Then... a force-beam from the disguised weapon in my hand, and my father's body was completely disintegrated. Again a sudden rushing by, as of wings or wind, and a feeling of great peace.

I deactivated the Sword of Light. Picking up the sword belt I had discarded earlier, I did some judicious altering and was able to fasten the belt around my own waist. I re-sheathed the sword. By Tradition, having dispatched the ProConsul with the Sword of Light, I now had to carry it with me until such time as I could return it to its rightful place in the Dallidian Hall of Ancestors.

I began to make preparations to flee Romulus. I bent and picked up the focus stone. Although it had been at the center of great powers and forces when Tuarek's body was disintegrated, it was completely unscathed. Although warm, it was no longer active. It could readily be returned to its leather pouch, and tucked back inside my uniform. There was no irritation to my burn. Rather, a cooling to aid in soothing my tortured skin.

I went to
the

televewing screen and, transmitting on a narrow beam to avoid detection, tied into the control bridge of the *Khatera*. Julia Adona responded immediately.

"Yes, SubComma-- my Lady!" she was startled to see the Imperial Crux on my chest.

Explanations could wait. "Julia, rendezvous with the Imperial torchship *VinJa Gai* in ten minutes at bearing 8, mark 2.56, azimuth 45. On signal, be prepared to set a course for 7/4.89/32."

"But, my Lady! Such a course will take us directly into Federation territory! This attack--"

"Julia, it is renegades of our own blood, with Klingon backing, who have brought the Empire to destruction. I would march through all twelve levels of Hell to preserve Romulus. I rather doubt the Federation is that bad."

"Yes, my Lady.. I mean, no, my lady." In spite of the seriousness of the present situation, I had to suppress a smile. Never before had I seen my First-in-Command so flustered, so lost in confusion. But, confusion or no, she would follow my instructions exactly.

I cut transmission, picked up my plasma rifle, and stepped through the door. The sound of battle was still obvious, even many levels underground. I started down the long corridor to the main landing pod. Several times I had to stop and flatten myself against the walls to escape falling debris from near-hits by the attacking forces. I began to feel the constant bombardment was a permanent thing, that this strident civil-war had always been a part of my life.

Idly, I wondered how far the Palace was from complete destruction. As site after site fell before the enemy, increased fire-power was coming to bear on the Palace. It would fall soon. I would have to sound for evacuation. With any luck, enough warriors would escape to harry the enemy from hiding in the future.

I reached the landing pod. Harroll and Hador were already in position to be transported to the *VinJa Gai*. Harroll, with the resiliency of youth, was momentarily able to forget the extermination of his family with his current excitement.

"Lareesha, isn't it thrilling? Hador tells me we are going to escape from the treachery of the Klingons. Will we turn pirate to

harry them from the star-lanes?"

Hador and I shared adult looks above the head of the Crown Prince-- who was, in reality, just a very brave little boy. "We shall see, my liege. Perhaps, if all goes well, we shall indeed 'turn pirate'."

"And you, Lareesha, are you to be my regent?"

I assented,

"Good. I knew I could depend on my foster-father to provide me with an excellent regent." He looked around. "But where is the Praetor? Is he not coming with us?"

By this time Hador had noted both the Imperial Crux at my breast and the Sword of Light at my waist. "My liege," he softly interrupted, "the Lady Lareesha is your Praetor now."

Harroll looked to me, a question in his eyes. As he realized the significance of the Crux, the Sword, even the golden ring on my finger, his excitement died. He donned adulthood.

"Yes, I see. My Lady, I grieve with you, and I regret that we can not give all due honor to those who died in our cause."

I looked at the Crown Prince. "We shall grieve in our own time, in our own way." My glance passed on to take in Hador. "And the makers of our grief shall grieve in turn." We clasped hands, all three, bound together by the ties which had been forged by that day's fires.

The *Vinja Gai* arrived at the rendezvous station. I set off the Palace excavation signal, then joined the Crown Prince and Hador on the transport pad. We prepared ourselves for transportation to the Praetorian torchship.

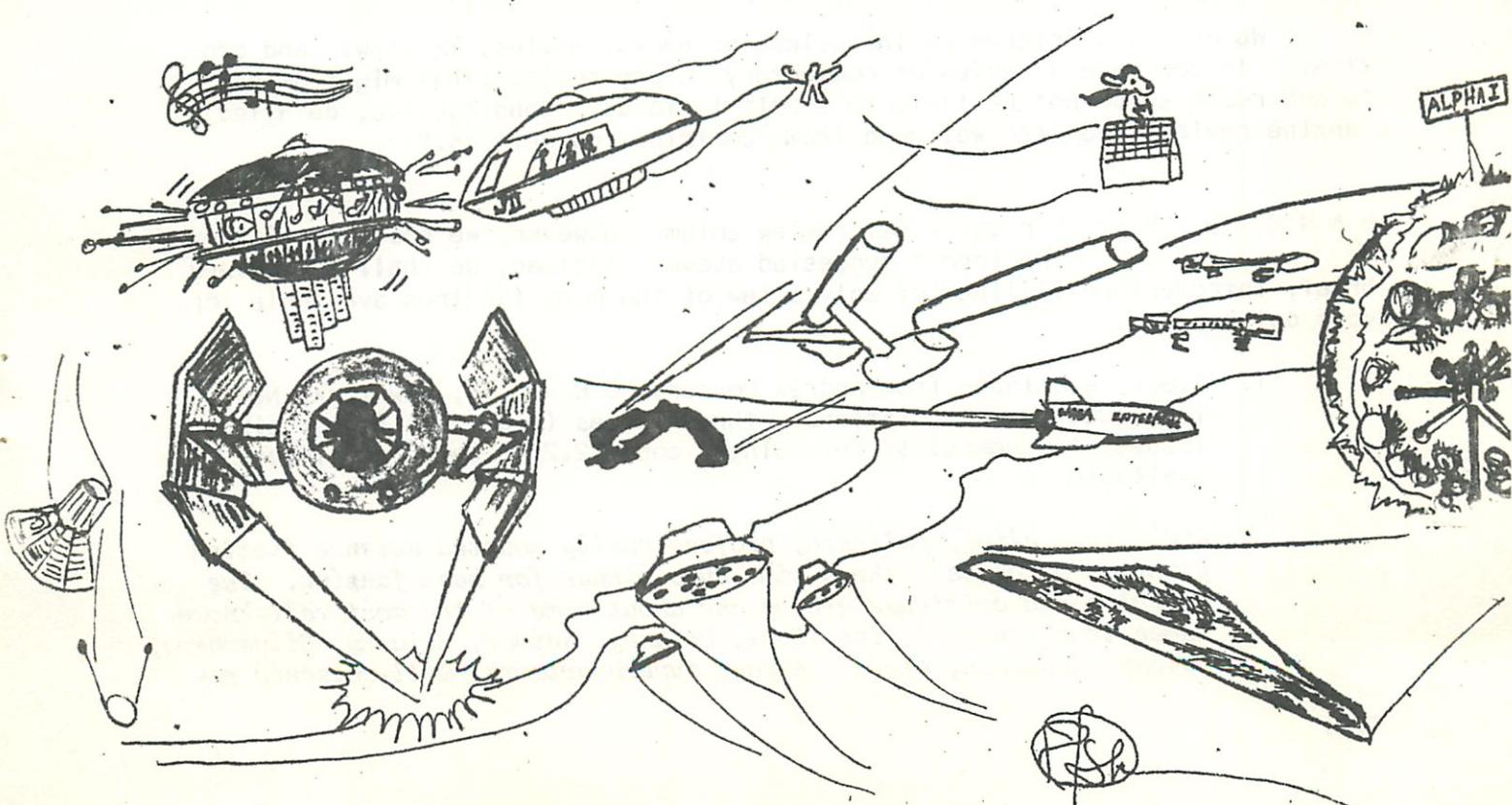
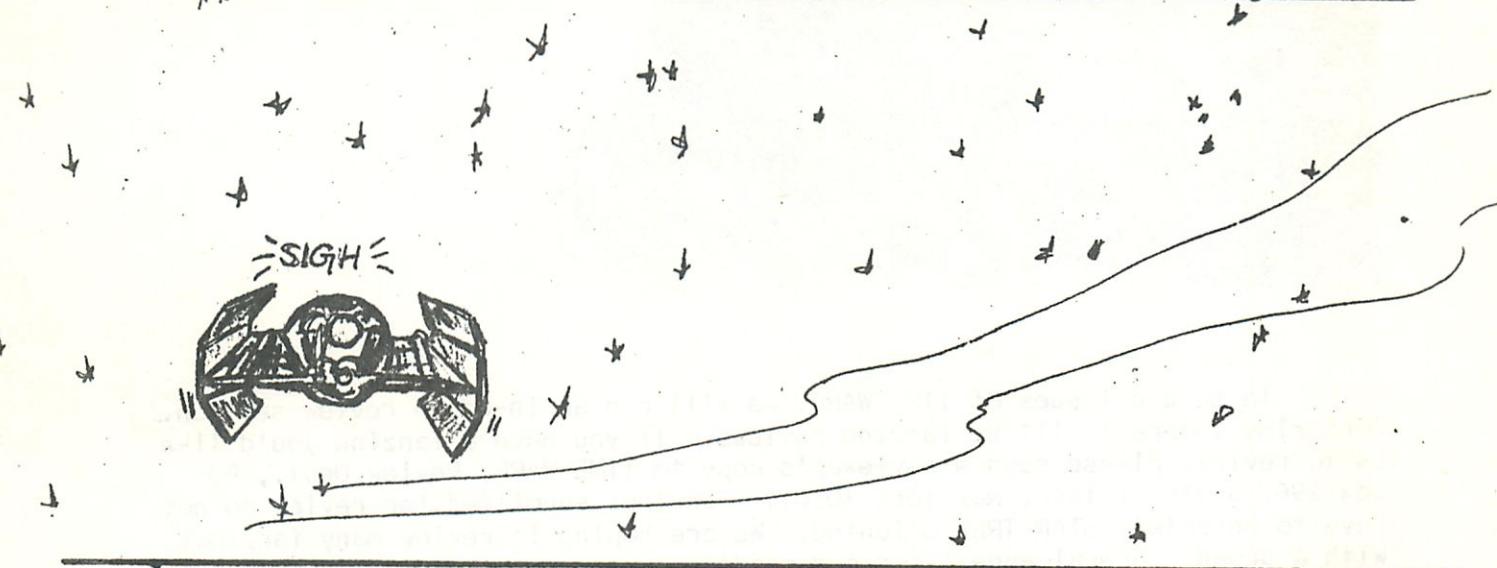
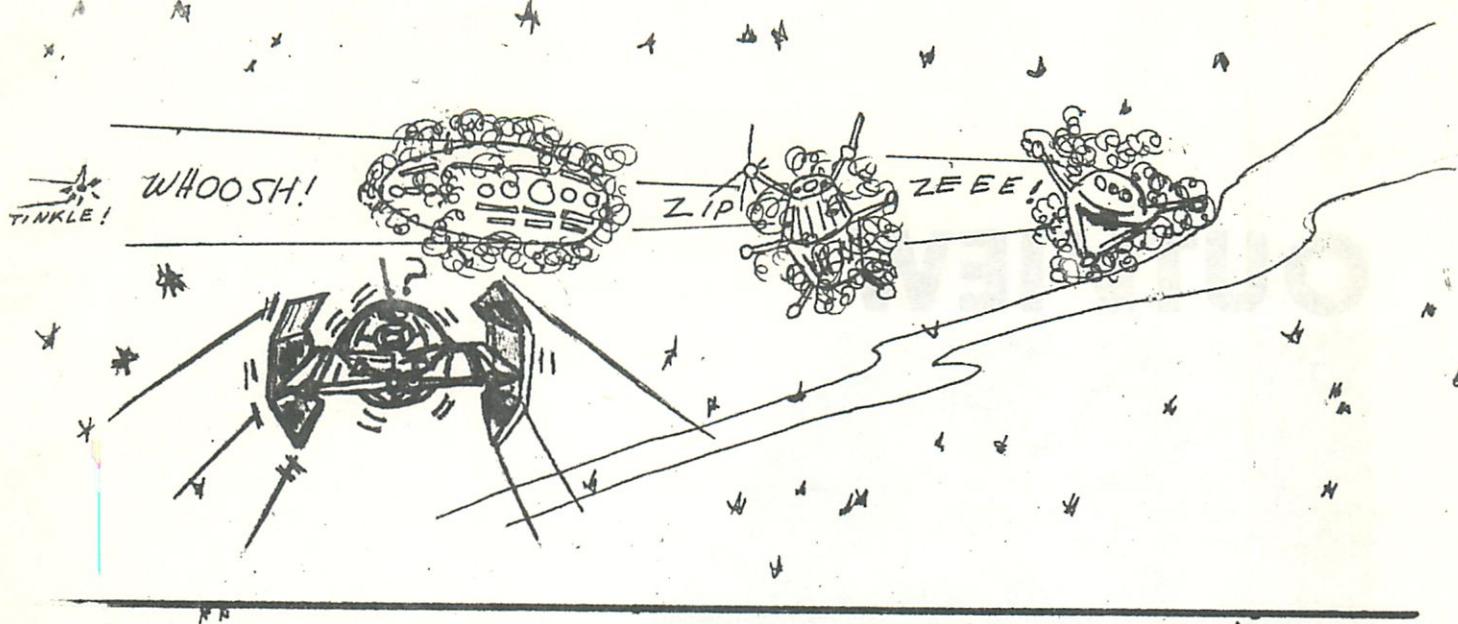
I gave one last look around as the evacuation alarm continued its clangorous warning. When, if ever, would I see my homeland again? Before me was a new and unknown world, a world of bonding, a world of *cytherea*.

I looked at my comrades, beginning now to sparkle into nothingness. Would we be successful in our quest? I did not know. But before us lay the *Vinja Gai*, and the start of our new lives.

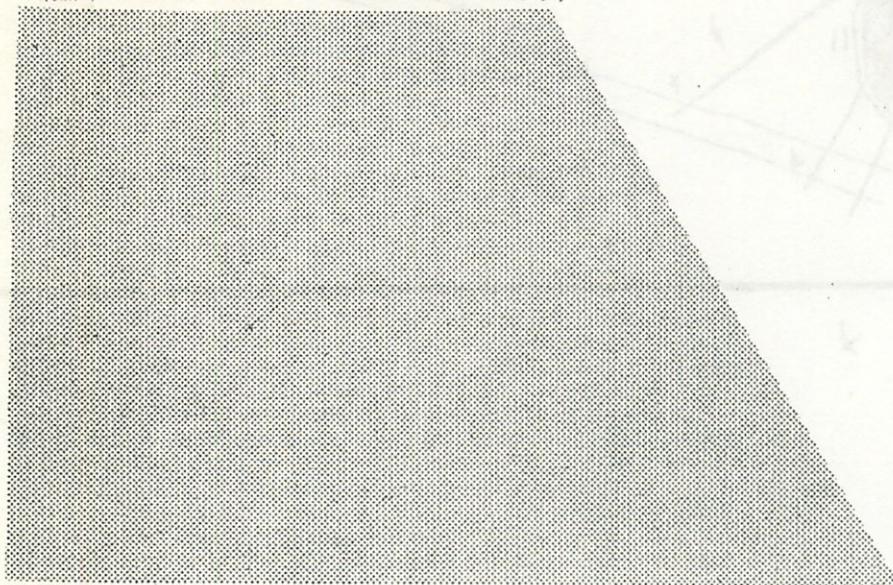
* * * * *

Cytherea... an ancient Romulan word with many complex philosophical connotations. Its most obvious usage is in describing the basic underlying obversion of a given situation. That which seems to be, is not, that which seems to be not, is. This concept underlies all relationships, on many levels. It inextricably threads its way through the story which follows...

.THE END



OUTVIEW



In future issues of TIME WARP, we will run an in-depth review section. Our prime interest will be fanzine reviews. If you have a fanzine you'd like us to review, please send a reviewer's copy to TIME WARP, Review Dept., PO Box 296, Staten Island, New York 10301. Fanzines submitted for review do not have to be solely STAR TREK oriented. We are hoping to review many fanzines with a broad, general appeal for our readers.

We are also interested in reviews of books, movies, TV shows, and pro-zines. If you have a review or commentary on any subject that might appeal to our readers, do not hesitate to submit it to us. Constructive, detailed fanzine reviews are also welcomed from "contributing critics."

FANZINES : For our first review column, however, we shall not follow the format suggested above. Instead, we shall offer very brief, introductory listings of only a few of the many fanzines available for your delectation.

- *1. ALGOL, available from Andrew Porter, PO Box 4175, New York, New York 10017. Subscriptions: three issues (one year) \$4.50; six issues (two years) \$7.50. Single copy \$2.25. Some back issues available.

ALGOL is a slick, polished, professionally mounted science fiction genzine, which is a three-time Hugo winner for best fanzine. The articles and critiques are by and about some of the most well-known names in science-fiction (Pohl, Delaney, Asimov, Zelazny, Silverberg, DeCamp, Anderson, etc.). Always superb artwork, well-reasoned re-

views, and fascinating LOCs add further dimension to this leading fanzine. Highly recommended for the serious science-fiction fan.

- *2. ALTERNATE UNIVERSE #4, Vol. 1 and 2, available from Shirley Malewski, 481 Main Street, Hatfield, Massachusetts 01038. Please send SASE (Self-addressed, stamped envelope) for current price and availability.

In Volume 1 of ALTERNATE UNIVERSE #4 James Kirk is courtmartialed and denied any future contact with a Federation Starbase. Held criminally responsible for the destruction of an entire solar system, Kirk must build a new life for himself; he must find himself, and must find a new meaning for life. Kirk does rebuild his life - and discovers Lightfleet, a massive under-cover agency dedicated to keeping the peace throughout the galaxy. Volume 2 continues Kirk's adventures in Lightfleet, introduces more of the Lightfleet personnel to us, and includes a mission to the Klingon Empire to preserve the fabric of peace. This is, indeed, a fascinating "alternate universe" for all Trekkies.

3. AMRA, available from George Scithers, Box 8243, Philadelphia, PA 19101. Subscriptions: ten issues (very irregularly printed!) for \$6.00. Single copy 75¢. Some back issues available.

This Hugo winning fanzine was originally designed for the many fans of Robert E. Howard, particularly devotees of the swash-buckling Conan series. Since its inception, however, AMRA has widened its appeal. It is now a must for anyone seriously interested in the sword-and-sorcery sub-genre of science-fiction. Articles, poetry, and parodies by and about some of the best known names in the s-and-s field (Anderson, Carter, DeCamp, Moore, Norton, etc.) are regular features. The art-work is always outstanding, and such famed artists as Krenkle, Barr, and Kirk have appeared on the pages of AMRA.

4. BERENGARIA, available from Vicki Kirlin, 13726 Harrison Plaza, #406, Omaha, Nebraska 68137. #9 most current issue. SASE.

BERI is a ST/SF fanzine exhibiting a wide range of interests. The Loch Ness monster, vampires, lost princesses, sentient dragons, Kraith, hallucinogenic worlds, Kolchak on the Planet of the Apes: all have been featured in this fanzine along with the usual Trekfare. Issue by issue, BERI shows marked improvement, and it bears watching.

5. DELTA TRIAD, available from Laura Scarsdale, 1627 East 17th St., Owensboro, KY 42301. #4 most current issue. SASE.

DELTA TRIAD SUPPLEMENT, available from above address. SASE.

DELTA TRIAD is dedicated to the exploration of the Uhura/Kirk relationship. The love-affair between the two is handled tastefully and believably, and adds new depth and dimension to the character of Uhura. The presentation of DELTA TRIAD is outstanding: crisp, clear copy, outstanding art-work, and excellent covers. The fiction, on the whole, is uniformly good. The

characters are all handled nicely, particularly Uhura. The plots range from gentle romances to action-adventure tales.

DELTA TRIAD SUPPLEMENT is DT's 'adult' zine; however, the stories are rated 'R' (or even 'PG') rather than 'X'. Strong characterizations, interesting plots, and smooth, even writing.

6. DESPATCH, available from Gail Saville and Barbara Metzke, PO Box 1018, Tallahassee, FLA 32302. \$3.00 per year along with annual membership in the Mark Lenard International Fanclub. One year-book plus three zines per year.

The official 'house-organ' of the MLIFC, the stories and articles in DESPATCH usually revolve around some aspect of Mr. Lenard's career, or highlight a particular character he has portrayed. Sarek and the Romulan Commander are, of course, highlighted, but other roles are not neglected.

7. ERIDANI TRIAD, published by Judith Brownlee, DBA Eridani Triad, 1553 Fillmore, Denver, CO 80206. SASE.

Three issues of ERIDANI TRIAD were published several years ago and have been out-of-print since. They are now being reissued, and future issues are planned. "Tis a consummation devotedly to be wished." One of the early Trek-zines, many of the stories in ET are classics.

8. FURAHA, available from Virginia Walker, PO Drawer #350, Ayer, MA 01432. (Note: this address may no longer be valid, since Ms. Walker is in the process of moving across country.) #1-5 currently in print. #6&7 due shortly. \$2.50 by hand, \$2.75 book rate. Subscriptions: three issues for \$6.00.

FURAHA is the official publication of the Nichelle Nichols Fan Club. A secondary zine emphasis is on 'the women of Star Trek.' The fiction is of excellent quality, and both reprints and original fiction are used. Reproduction is neat and clear, with excellent front and back covers.

9. GRUP, available from Carrie Brennan, 3405 North Sinton Road, #107, Colorado Springs, CO 80907. \$2.00 per copy plus 60¢ postage 3rd class. Back issues out of print. #5 current issue. #6 due shortly.

The original Dirty Old Broad's fanzine, GRUP specializes in 'adult fiction' and in strategically undraped illos of the Enterprise crew. Porn content ranges from implied to triple-x rated. Along with the porn, some well-written stories on adult themes first appeared in the pages of GRUP.

10. A HANDFUL OF SNOWFLAKES, available from Pandora Press, PO box 404, Commerce City, CO 80022. SASE.

MORE TREK TALES, see above address. Again, SASE.

In A HANDFUL OF SNOWFLAKES, Steve Barnes presents a number of stories, poems and illos based on the theme of 'Love', love in its many forms, particularly as relating to Commander Spock. The stories are well-plotted, have consistent characterization, and develop action smoothly. The title story is a Trek fiction classic.

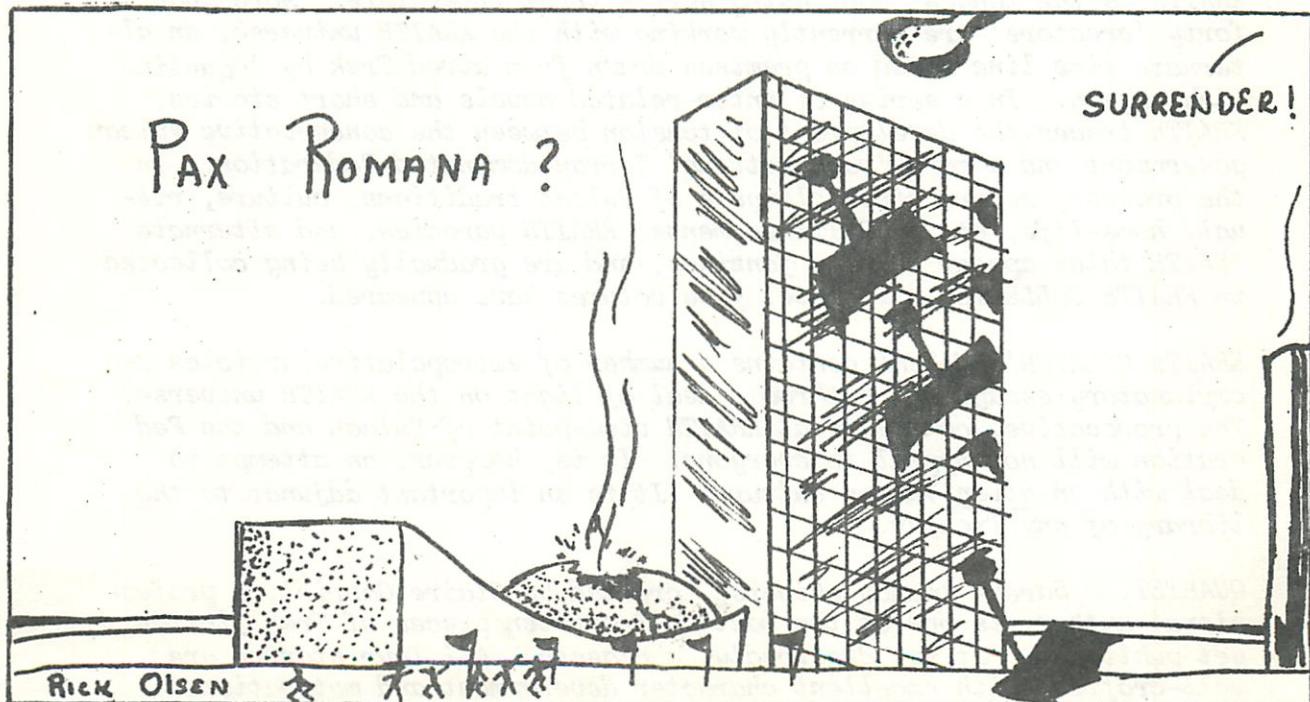
MORE TREK TALES gives us more of Ms. Barnes's STAR TREK fiction. The stories are nicely polished, and a smooth read- but, after AHOS, scarcely memorable.

11. IDIC, available from Leslye Lillker, 37 Clark Avenue, Lynbrook, NY 11563. #1-3 out-of-print. #4 3.00 by hand/ \$4.12 first class. #5 (The Forging) \$5.50 plus postage. Sahaj Collected \$7.50 plus postage.

IDIC highlights the development of Sahaj, natural son of Spock and the Vulcan ambassador to Ventura, T'Marr. The zine features a wide-range of writers and artists, many of them among the most well-known in fandom. Crisp copy, excellent art reproduction, and attractive cover designs add to the zine's initial impact.

12. IN A DIFFERENT REALITY, available from John Hertig, 306 W. High, Urbana, IL 61801. #1-3 available. \$2.00 per issue, first class.

IN A DIFFERENT REALITY offers a mixed bag of STAR TREK staples. There are nicely presented short stories, cartoons, puzzles, poems, graffiti, and art-work. Improvement on the zine has been steady and noticeable, and future issues will bear watching.



13. INDEPENDENT ENTITY, available from Lyn Martindale, 190 Lawrence Place, Orchard Park, NY 14127, or from Sheryl Przybylski, Box #1775, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778. #1 out of print. SASE on #2&3.

INDEPENDENT ENTITY is an enjoyable ST genzine. It contains some clever short, humorous pieces: puzzles, cartoons, trivia, book reviews (by Jackie Lichtenberg), a delightful comic strip, etc. General ST-oriented fiction is also featured. An inexpensive mimeo zine. IE provides light and beguiling reading.

- *14. INTERPHASE, edited by Connie Faddis, 5731 Kentucky Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15232. All issues of INTERPHASE, #1-4, are out-of-print. Xerox reprints are available from Lori-Chapek-Carleton, 557 Cornell, East Lansing, MI 48823. SASE for price list and availability.

INTERPHASE is the most visually beautiful fanzine in STrekdom. It also features some of the best fiction and articles relating to the ST universes to have yet hit print. Some of ST's most outstanding authors and illustrators have been featured in 'PHASE: Faddis herself, Lichtenberg, Smith, Block, Berman, Miller, Feyer, Landon, Moaven, Carleton, Siegrist, Nemeth, Aumerle, Walske, Marder, Hall, and the list goes on. Indeed, a complete listing of the contributors to 'PHASE reads like a WHO'S WHO of STAR TREK fandom.

- *14. KRAITH COLLECTED, available from Carol Lynn, 11524 Nashville, Detroit, MI 48205. SASE for current availability and price.

KRAITH CREATOR'S MANUAL, SASE as above.

QUARTET, SASE as above.

KRAITH is the longest continuing series in ST literature. More than forty 'creators' are currently working with the *KRAITH* universe, an alternate time line based on premises drawn from aired Trek by Jacqueline Lichtenberg. In a series of inter-related novels and short stories, *KRAITH* traces the development of tension between the conservative Vulcan government and a more 'rambunctious' Terran-dominated Federation. In the process, we are given glimpses of Vulcan traditions, culture, ritual, home-life, etc. *KRAITH* segments, *KRAITH* parodies, and alternate *KRAITH* tales appear in many fanzines, and are gradually being collected in *KRAITH COLLECTED*. To date, five volumes have appeared.

KRAITH CREATOR'S MANUAL contains a number of extropalative articles and explanatory essays which throw a deal of light on the *KRAITH* universe. The provocative, controversial *KRAITH* view-point of Vulcan and the Federation will not appeal to everyone. It is, however, an attempt to deal with an alien Vulcan culture. It is an important adjunct to the library of any Trekkie.

QUARTET, a Sarek- Amanda universe created by Claire Gabriel, a professional author, is one of the most well-written pieces of Trek fiction yet published. It is, deservedly, a classic. All four stories are well-crafted, with excellent character development and motivation.

- *16. LOCUS, published by Locus Publications, PO Box 3938, San Francisco, CA 94119. Subscriptions: 12/\$9.00, 24/\$17.00 by second class mail; add 40¢ per issue for first class. Single copy price \$1.00. Back issues available. SASE.

LOCUS is THE monthly, general SF newszine. It routinely contains con listings, book reviews, book publication information, biographical notes, and other items of interest to fans. *LOCUS* is a three-time Hugo winner. It encompasses the entire spectrum of SF news, including ST items.

17. MASIFORM D, available from Poison Pen Press, 627 East 8th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11218. #6 current. No back issues in print. \$1.25 per issue.

THRESHOLD, available from Poison Pen Press, see above address. One shot, novel-length zine. \$1.25 per copy.

MASIFORM D is a carefully printed mimeo genzine genzine with a very 'homey' feel. In its pages appear fantasy, science fiction, and *Star Trek* material. Fiction, essays, parodies, transcripts of fan panel discussions, poetry, puzzles, illos, and extrapolative articles appear regularly in this zine; indeed, this diversity is *MASIFORM*'s greatest asset.

THRESHOLD, a novel by Carol Walske and Fern Marder, is one of the newest ST 'alternate universes.' Complete and self-contained in and of itself, the novel is nevertheless part of the 'kilingau' cycle developed by Walske and Marder. This cycle traces the Klingon-Federation war from opening hostilities to uneasy peace, particularly through the interactions of the Alkarin Kor and his family. *THRESHOLD* is a major part of the cycle. It is beautifully constructed, shows much thought and research, and reads well. It is a superbly produced mimeo zine.

- *18. MENAGERIE, published by boojums Press, 507 Locust Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49008. Subscriptions: 2/ \$3.50 first class; 2/\$3.00 third class. Single issues \$1.00 plus 65¢ postage. Some back issues available. #14 current issue. SASE for availability and for various bPress items.

Famous, or rather, infamous for the "How's Treks" parodies and for satirical masterpieces which deflate some of the most cherished cliches in fandom, *MENAGERIE* also prints excellent straight dramatic fiction, and poetry. MEN's serious work emphasizes extra-Enterprise stories featuring other than the 'Big Three.' This zine will not, therefore, appeal to everyone. But those wishing to expand the horizons of their ST reading should sample the wares purveyed in the pages of *MENAGERIE*.

- *19. NIGHT OF THE TWIN MOONS, available from Dr. Jean Lorrah, 301 S. 15th Street, Murray, KY 42071. \$3.00 plus 80¢ postage (fourth class/special handling).

FULL MOON RISING, available from Yeoman Press, 5445 Valles Avenue, Bronx, NY 10471. \$3.75 first class, \$3. book rate, \$4.50 overseas.

NTM COLLECTED, #1; available from Jean Lorrah, as above, \$2.50 plus 80¢.

PARTED FROM ME AND OTHER STORIES, available from Jean Lorrah, see above address. \$1.00 plus 35¢ postage (4th class/special handling).

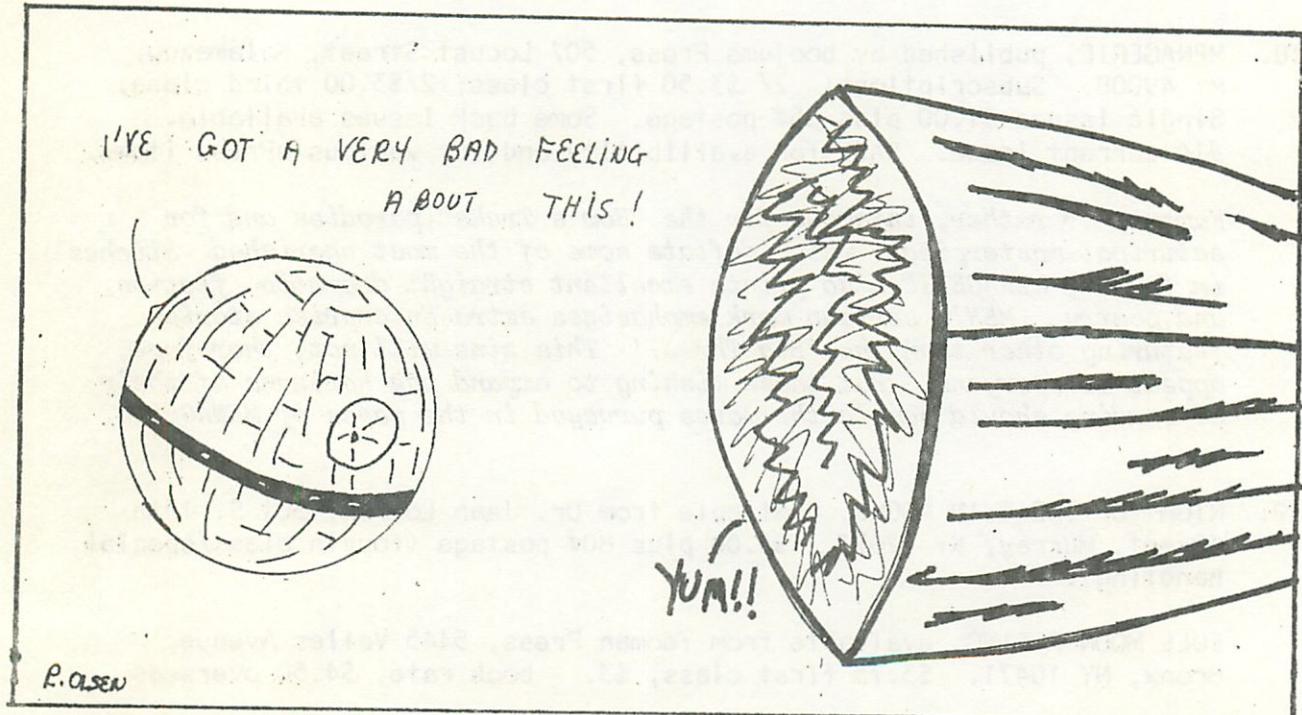
NIGHT OF THE TWIN MOONS is the novel that introduced Jean Lorrah's Sarek-Amanda universe. Their union is examined against a backdrop of interstellar politics and intrigue. While not everyone will agree with her version of Sarek - a sexual, emotional male who appears almost disquietly human at times - NTM is guaranteed to hold one's attention from beginning to end, and introduces some (to coin a phrase) fascinating new characters.

FULL MOON RISING is a series of four Sarek-Amanda stories serving as a prologue to the NTM universe. They trace the S/A relationship from their bonding to the conception of Spock. Lorrah maintains internal consistency, and her characters are well-drawn.

NTM COLLECTED #1 continues Lorrah's universe with five short stories, two essays, and a poem- all highlighting some aspect of the intriguing sarek-Amanda relationship.

PARTED FROM ME AND OTHER STORIES consists of four early Lorrah stories; although none are set in the NTM universe, they are well-written, with smooth pacing, believable characterizations, and developed plots.

20. PEGASUS, available from Pegasus Press, 5817 N. Paulina, Chicago, IL 60660. SASE for availability of #1&2. #3 tentatively scheduled for 4/30/78; \$3.60 third class (cannot guarantee delivery), \$4.80 first.



PEGASUS is a carefully printed mimeo zine with a sizeable range of interests: stories, articles, puzzles, poetry, art-work, parodies, etc. Its light fiction and its humorous pieces are particularly well done. Issue #3 will be a special 'All STAR WARS' edition.

- *21. A PIECE OF THE ACTION, available from STAR TREK WELCOMMITTEE, PO Box 19413, Denver, CO 80219. Subscriptions: \$5.50/12 issues. Single copies: 60¢ per issue. Some back issues available. SASE.

APOTA is the monthly news-letter of the STAR TREK WELCOMMITTEE, a non-profit, volunteer organization serving as a clearing house for information bearing on STAR TREK. APOTA keeps us current with the ST movie/tv show, the doings of our favorite stars and writers, and the activities of various clubs and organizations. Book information and con listings are also featured in APOTA, a must for all STfen.

22. PROBE, available from Winston Howlett, PO Box 206, New Rochelle, NY 10804. #12 current issue: \$4.00 in person and postage paid (4th class); \$5.00 first class. SASE for back issues.
- * GODDESS UHURA, available from Winston Howlett, see above address. \$3.50 in person. \$4.00 by mail.

An unpretentious, comfortable zine, PROBE continues to improve with each issue. Fiction, articles, and poetry are highlighted, along with rather chatty editorials reminiscent of those appearing in general sf zines. PROBE's editor is not afraid to experiment. He has had a sword-and-sorcery edition, has introduced several new KRAITH tales, has run a 'Man from U.N.C.L.E.'-ish series about the Welcommittee vs. agents of T.R.E.K.K.I.E., and has written a STAR TREK Fandom murder mystery.

GODDESS UHURA is the most definitive picture of Lt. Uhura yet drawn. The courage, wit, charm, and capabilities so ably hinted at by Nichelle Nichols in STAR TREK - this despite a dearth of decent scripts - is captured beautifully in the two main novellas of this volume. Howlett is presently working on the sequel to GODDESS UHURA, an episodic novel entitled CAPTAIN UHURA. SASE for publication information.

23. SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, published by Richard E. Geis, PO Box 11408, Portland Oregon 97211. Subscriptions: \$4.00 one year, \$7.00 two years. Single copies: \$1.50. Published quarterly. Back issues available. #24 current issue.

SFR is another Hugo winning SF genzine. As with most SF zines, there is no fiction. Instead the main features are in-depth interviews with major SF writers, reviews of new books, LOCs on issues large and small, feature columns, and spot illos. The entire 'zine is held together by the personal musings of editor Geis (and his severest critic and arch-rival, Alter Ego), musings which have garnered for him the Best Fan Writer Hugo on several occasions (in fact, I understand there is a movement afoot to have Geis/SFR declared a monopoly).

- *24. SCIENCE FICTION STUDIES, published by the English Department, Indiana State University, Terra Haute, Indiana 47809. Three Issues per year. Subscriptions: \$6.00 per year. Single copies: \$3.00 per issue. Some back issues available. SASE.

For the serious student of science fiction, SCIENCE FICTION STUDIES provides scholarly essays and discussions on many of the trends and topics of the field. This learned journal is not ST-related, but will prove to be of interest to those who have read widely and deeply in the SF genre, and who are involved with the deeper significances behind the works they have read. Critical essays about individual authors and analytical, in-depth book reviews are also provided.

25. SEHLAT'S ROAR, available from Randy Ash, 29409 Aspen Drive, Flat Rock, Michigan 48134. #1-5 currently available. SASE for price list.

SEHLAT'S ROAR is an engaging, carefully produced mimeo zine. Clean, crisp type-print and generally well-defined art-work show an excellent grasp of the strengths of the mimeo method and result in a very good-looking zine for a remarkably reasonable price. Moreover, the work in SR is markedly original. An outstanding feature is a xeno-anthropological series about the various aliens of the ST universe, as interpreted by a number of authors. The fiction is marked by sincerity and enthusiasm, as well as originality and quality. Artwork, likewise, is of high calibre. All in all, a most enjoyable and worthwhile zine.

26. SOUTHERN STAR, available from Rebecca Hoffman, 205 Pine Street, Greer, SC 29651. Issues #1&2 out of print. #3 may still be available, SASE. Current issue, #4, available for \$4.00 book rate or in person, \$5.50 first class.

SOUTHERN STAR offers a very mixed bag of Trek-wares: puzzles, word games, grafitti, and contemporary science articles enliven its pages, but its main attraction is a diverse selection of fiction which introduce new characters, explore relationships on other starships, and look more closely at the Klingons. A Klingon-English dictionary is another unique feature of this zine. Moreover, SOUTHERN STAR prints straight sf and horror stories in addition to Trek-fiction.

- *27. SPOCKANALIA, available from Poison Pen Press, 627 East 8th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11218. Issues #1-5 being kept in print to meet demand. \$2.50 per copy.

SPOCKANALIA is the oldest STAR TREK related zine. Although no longer in current production, it is being kept in print to meet the demand from new readers. The zine wears well. Its contents equal or surpass much that is being printed to-day. A 'secondary universe' fanzine, SPOCKANALIA specializes in extrapolative articles and essays based on extensions of current knowledge in psychology, chemistry, physics, biology, archeology, religion, and sociology. It provides fascinating reading, giving depth and validity to the concepts of the STAR TREK universe(s). Other features in SPOCKANALIA include art, fiction, poetry, etc. A must for any ST fan.

28. STARDATE: UNKNOWN, available from Gerry Downes, 3925 West 79th, Anchorage, Alaska 99502. Issues #1-3 available. SASE. #4 due shortly.

ALTERNATIVE: THE EPILOGUE TO ORION, SASE to above address for current availability. Not sold to those under 18.

The first issue of STARDATE: UNKNOWN was essentially a personalzine from author/artist Gerry Downes, and consisted of three novelettes, each about one of the 'Big Three.' With #2, the zine expanded to include other artists and authors, some of fandom's best. STARDATE: UNKNOWN is a good general ST zine. No one character or theme is emphasized, and humorous as well as serious pieces are used. The quality is consistently good, both for art and prose. Physical appearance is also good, with crisp, clean copy.

ALTERNATIVE continues the thread of controversy introduced by Downes in the Kirk segment of STARDATE: UNKNOWN #1. Although embracing the concept of a homosexual love affair between Kirk and Spock, this is not a porn zine. The separate vignettes are tastefully handled; indeed, to some it may appear that Downes used a 'cop-out' ending to her tale. The artwork and storyline are subtly, poetically developed. There is eroticism, but a welcome lack of licentiousness.

29. STARFLEET HANDBOOK, available from Geoffrey Mandel, 201 West 16th Street, Apt 20A. New York, NY 10011. SASE.

The HANDBOOK is an official-appearing zine of particular interest to those interested in the technology behind STAR TREK, and to those fascinated by the probable realities of the Federation. No fiction or poetry, but the zine does feature xanological reports, blueprints (yes, this is that Geoffrey Mandell!), time-lines, etc.

30. STAR TREK SHOWCASE, available from Barbara Sharon Emily, Route 2, Box 100, Washington, Indiana 47501. There are four volumes of SHOWCASE in print. SASE for current price and availability.

SHOWCASE #1 introduces the reader to Lorna Mitchell, a 20th century woman trapped in the time of the Enterprise who comes to love Ambassador Sarek and who weds him after Amanda's death. SHOWCASE #2 continues the Lorna-Sarek saga, reintroduces Gary Seven and Roberta Lincoln, paints a remarkably three-dimensional portrait of Kang and his crew-members, and solves the Christine/Spock impasse most logically. #3&4 continue the development of the SHOWCASE universe as a viable, interesting one in which to project STAR TREK-based stories and art.

- *31. THE OTHER SIDE OF PARADISE, available from Amy Falkowitz, 323 Higdon Avenue, Apt. #3, Mountain View, CA 94041 or Signe Landon, 400 Greendale Way #2, San Jose, CA 95429. #1&2 out of print. #3 delayed in publication through no fault of the editors. This will be a pre-sold issue, so SASE to see if orders still being accepted.

TOSOP is an impressive zine, containing art folios, illustrations, fiction, articles, and poetry by an intriguing line-up of fans... including

professional writer Marion Zimmer Bradley of Darkover fame. Eileen Roy's alternate KRAITH series originated in the pages of this zine with the beautifully constructed "T'Uriammé's Victory". TOSOP sets consistently high standards for its stories and articles, but its artwork is even more outstandingly good, and the zine remains primarily a visual experience. THE OTHER SIDE OF PARADISE #3 will actually be a 'two-for-the-price-of-one' issue in that it will be two books: PARADISE, for regular art and stories; THE OTHER SIDE, for adult pieces. Highly recommended.

- *32. T-NEGATIVE, available from Ruth Berman, 5620 Edgewater Boulevard, Minneapolis, MN 55417. Published irregularly. \$1.00 per double issue, \$2.50 for three double issues. Back issues available: #1-20, 22-31 presently in print with the missing issue to be reprinted. Double issue 32-33 is the current issue. #34-35 will be the last..

T-NEGATIVE is the longest running STAR TREK zine being printed. It is also one of the most consistently good zines around. Fiction, poetry, essays and articles are highlighted, along with columns about the ST stars and writers. Work from T-NEGATIVE has been discussed in STAR TREK LIVES and reprinted in NEW VOYAGES. A professional author and poet, Ms. Berman knows what constitutes a good fanzine. She writes well, and she edits well. T-NEGATIVE'S demise is mourned.

- 33 UTOPIA UNLIMITED, available from Brian J. McCarthy, 499 Fourth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215. SASE.

UTOPIA UNLIMITED is an attempt to provide a serious, noteworthy news- and review-zine for ST/SF/comics fans based in the NY Metropolitan area. Con listings, mini-reviews, and news items are included in a mimeo zine that makes a good introduction to fannish doings.

- *3 . WARPED SPACE, available from T'Kuhtian Press, c/o Lori Chapek-Carleton, 557 Cornell, East Lansing, MI 48823. Single issue: \$2.00 by hand, \$2.50 third class, \$2.80 first class. Four issue subscription: \$9.00 third class, \$10.20 first class.

THE OBSC'ZINE, see above address. Single issue: \$3.50 by hand, \$4.25 third class, \$4.85 first class. Four issue subscription: \$15.00 third class, \$17.40 first class.

WARPED SPACE has the distinction of being the most regularly printed zine in ST fandom. (As a leading contender in the delayed zine of the year category, I'd give anything - well, almost anything, souls, David and otherwise, excluded - for the editor's secret formula!) WARPED SPACE has shown continuous improvement since the first volume in contents, graphic design, and print quality. WS is known for its light, humorous pieces and its slightly wacky viewpoint of the STAR TREK universe. It has also established itself as a zine with strong, straight dramatic fiction, also. (Is there anyone who has not heard of 'The Weight'?)

Yet another contender in the 'adult/porn zine' category, the OBSC'ZINE is neatly printed and attractively packaged. The stories and the illos

quite explicit, and, on the whole, there is a lack of the lightness of touch and wry humor which marked OB's predecessors, WARPED SPACE X and XX. Many of OB's stories read like sex-manual excerpts, complete with graphic illustrations. Also, if the K/S homosexual relationship does not thrill you, be forewarned that many of the stories in the first two issues of OBSC'ZINE were oriented in that direction.

The above list of fanzines was carefully culled from the many diverse 'zines to cross our desk in the course of the past year. All of the zines mentioned were of interest, all had something to impart to a reader. Some are, of course, particularly outstanding for one reason or another. Such zines are marked with an asterisk; this marking is purely subjective, and should not be read as a down-grading of those zines which are unmarked.

We hope that the general comments accompanying each zine listing will assist in directing readers towards those zines in which they have an interest. This list is not meant to be complete, and will be added to from time to time.

CONVENTION LISTING:

KUBLA KHAN SEX (May 5-7), Quality Inn Parkway, Nashville, TN. GoH Theodore Sturgeon, MC Andy Offut, Fan GoH John Cleve. Membership \$7.50 in advance, \$8.50 at the door. Info: Ken Moore, 647 Devon Dr., Nashville, TN 37220. SF.

X-CON '78 (June 2-4), Holiday Inn Central, Milwaukee, WI. GoH Anne McCaffrey, TM Gordon Dickson, FGoh Marty Coady. Membership \$8.00. Info: X-Con, Box 11823, Milwaukee, WI 53211. SF.

UNICON IV (July 7-9), Sheraton Silver Springs, Silver Springs, MD. GoH Theodore Sturgeon. Info: Unicon, PO Box 263, College Park, MD 20740. SF.

DARKOVER GRAND COUNCIL MEETING (July 9), Boro Park YMHA, 4910 14th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY. GoH Jacqueline Lichtenberg, panel discussants Devra Langsam (Spockanalia and Masiform D) and Jean Lorrah (NTM). Registration \$2.50 in advance, \$3.50 at the door. Info: Armida Council, 1647 56th St., B'klyn 11204.

ULTRACON (July 7-9), Miami, FL. GoH George Takei, Grace Lee Whitney, Walter Koenig. Membership \$12.00. Info: SASE to 13787 66th St., #D-240, Kendall Lakes, FL 33183. ST professional con.

STAR TREK ATLANTA (June 30-July 2), Atlanta Hilton, Atlanta, GA. GoH William Shatner, James Doohan, Nichelle Nichols, George Takei. Membership \$15.00 until May 1st, \$20.00 thereafter. Info: Tristar, 88 New Dorp Plaza, Staten Island, NY 10306. Professional ST con.

AUGUST PARTY (Aug 4-6), Sheraton Silver Springs, Silver Springs, MD. \$5.00 to July 10, \$6.00 after, no door. Info: Maryland Star Trek Assn., PO Box 924, College Park, MD 20740. SASE. Fan-oriented ST.

ODDY*CON (Aug 11-14), Lansing Holiday Inn South, Lansing Michigan. \$6.00 until July 1, \$7.50 after. Info: Ingrid Cross, 3650 Dell Rd., Holt, MI 48842. ST limited membership fan con. SASE.

STAR TREK PHILADELPHIA (Aug 18-20), Philadelphia Sheraton, Philadelphia, PA. GoH William Shatner and James Doohan. \$20.00 registration. Info: Tristar, 88 New Dorp Plaza, Staten Island, NY 10306. Professional ST con.

STAR TREK AMERICA (Sept 2-4), Statler Hilton, New York, NY. GoH William Shatner, James Doohan, Walter Koenig, Isaac Asimov. Membership \$15.00 until July 4, \$20 thereafter. Info: Tristar, 88 New Dorp Plaza, Staten Island, NY 10306. Pro con.

IGUANACON (Aug 31-Sept 4), Adams Hotel, Phoenix, AZ. GoH Harlan Ellison, FGoh Bill Bowers, TM F. M. Busby. Supporting Membership \$7.00, attending \$20.00. Info: Iguanacon, Box 1072, Phoenix, AZ 85001. THE con for SF fan.

MOVIE REVIEW: The big news of the year revolves around the long awaited STAR TREK movie series movie with ~~new cast~~ ^{old cast except for McCoy} entire old crew. TIME WARP has achieved a coup. Disguised as simple CIA agents we were able to ~~break into~~ gain entry to the Paramount ST soundstage. Also, we recovered some stills to be used in a coming publicity campaign.

Readers, we are pleased to announce:

THE STAR TREK MOVIE !!

